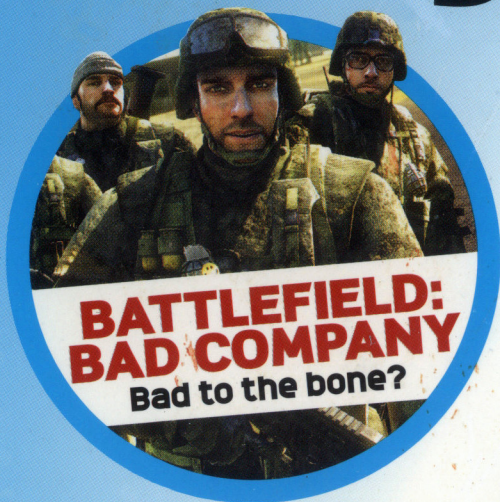


PlayStation®

Official Magazine - Australia



007

We're left shaken AND stirred! Find out why...



ALL NEW!

- Tom Clancy's EndWar
- Valkyria Chronicles
- Tom Clancy's HAWX
- Sonic Unleashed
- Shaun White Snowboarding
- Saints Row 2
- Fallout 3
- Far Cry 2
- Pure

WIN!

FVII: Crisis Core PSP
GH: Aerosmith Les Paul Guitar

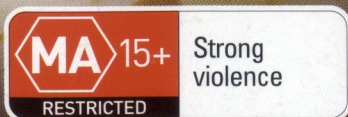
STAR WARS THE FORCE UNLEASHED

The best Star Wars game ever?
The latest info straight from Lucas HQ...





BECOME JASON BOURNE AND...



PLAYSTATION 3



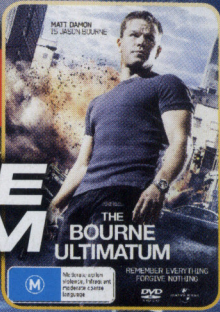
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PlayStation 2



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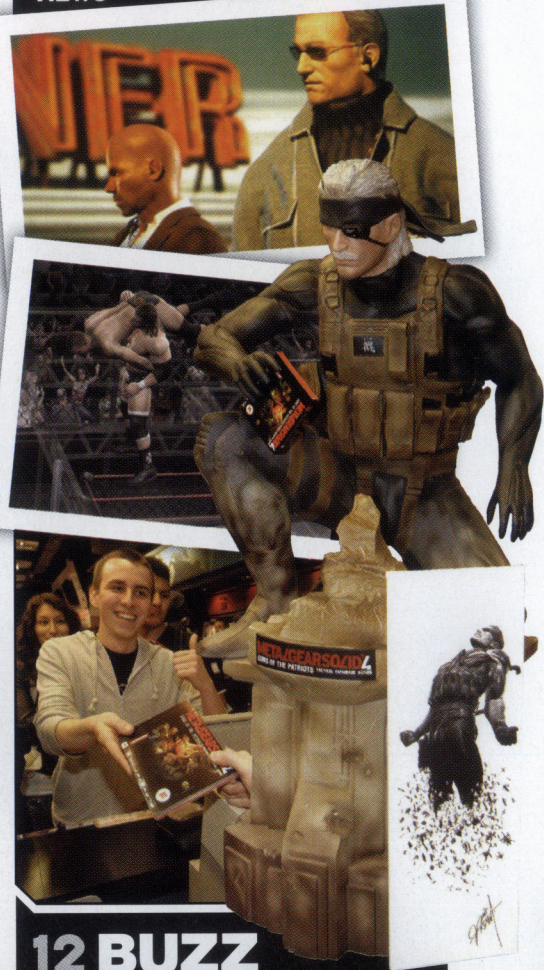


COVER STORY

28 *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*

Star Wars... euphoria... Vader... the force... need we say more? If so turn to page 28 – stat!

NEWS



12 BUZZ

Metal Gear mania, top Sony exclusives cancelled, *Rise of the Argonauts* revealed, new PS3 controller, and much, much more...

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60 *Dead Space*

Aliens, big crazy, f'ed up aliens in freaky claustrophobic environments. Count us in. Big time.

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72 *Battlefield: Bad Company*

Company B discovers that all that glitters is not gold when Preston Malowe signs up and goes AWOL in *Bad Company*!

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54 *James Bond*

Ever since *Goldeneye*, we've been waiting for a *Bond* successor of the same high quality – could this be it?

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80 *BUZZ! Quiz TV*

We're buzzin', baby. Get your itchy trigger finger twitching for our review of the first next gen *Buzz!*

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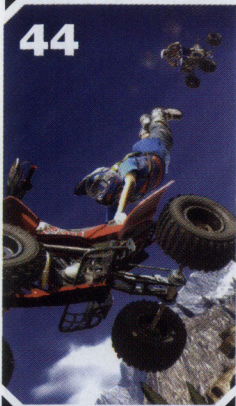


34 *Fallout 3*

Mini-nuclear grenade launchers blasting it out on a post apocalyptic battlefield. That pique your interest much?

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Mic check, one, two



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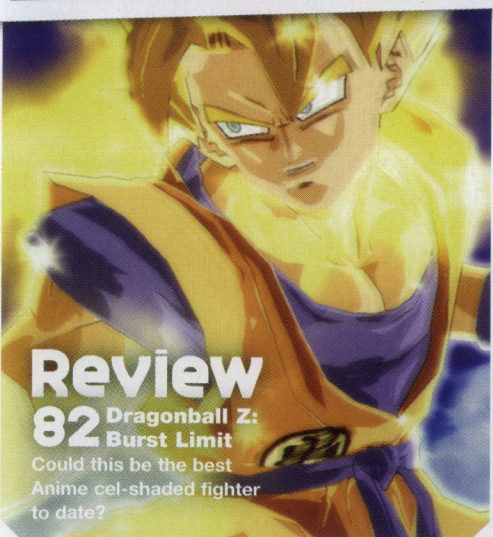
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It's on fire!

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82 Dragonball Z:
Burst Limit

Could this be the best
Anime cel-shaded fighter
to date?



20 WIN! WIN!
WIN! WIN!

Win an awesome brand new
guitar, a Final Fantasy VII: Crisis
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EDITOR'S LETTER



"...I've since become aware that metal bikinis are only comfortable in the movies..."

The force and i have always had problems. Whilst i dreamt of being Leia when i was young, oh so young, I've since become aware that metal bikinis are only comfortable in movies and *that* hair really isn't attractive on anyone!

So faced with filling an issue with Lucas moments I felt the need to run, hide, scream and throw a massive hissy fit. Jar Jar Binks, Indy aliens and *Howard the Duck* aside the man did manage to produce some amazing work and *The Force Unleashed* has had more than a few staff members giggling with glee, which makes a nice change from the obsessive *Metal Gear* adoration floating around of late. Not that it isn't warranted! (I fear Mark's wrath when it comes to *MGS4*).

There is a lot more going on though, I'm in LA (Or i will be by the time you get to read this!) being dragged around by the PR monster that is E3, sampling all the gooey niceness of the next big releases. We're already hooked on *Fallout 3* and *Pure* (to the point where I woke up thinking i could ride an ATV off a 100 foot jump) and joining Bad Company is a definite maybe!

Ness

Vanessa Morgan
Editor

PS3 online: sibernaut

"Too many fingers, too many thumbs. Something wicked this way comes" – *The Bravery*

Who is your Star Wars alter ego?

MARK SERRELS

Vader. He's bad. Real bad. He's Michael Jackson in the 80s bad. Michael Jackson babysitting your children bad. He's also an intergalactic studmuffin, siring force equipped kids throughout the galaxy. I respect that.

Online: Serrels



PHILLIP JORGE

Jabba the Hutt, since I'm fast acquiring a gut of the same magnitude. Can't stop eating that Ramen baby. Plus the idea of keeping bikini clad maidens in chains appeals to the Philmeister. Ya wanna wonga? Ya Jabba no-watta...

Online: PhilLipo



ADAM MATHEW

Salacious Crumb, the little lizard monkey dude in *Return of the Jedi*. Why? Because I'm lazy, my eyes are beady, and I maniacally laugh at other people's misfortune. Also, I used to chill with Jabba the Hutt (my ex).

Online: YoumumsAWESOME



DAVE KOZICKI

It's gotta be Han Solo. It's not 'cos I shoot first (ladies, back me up here), but more for being a loveable rogue, a misunderstood smartarse, have a hairy close mate (O'Connor) and suffer from partial blindness.

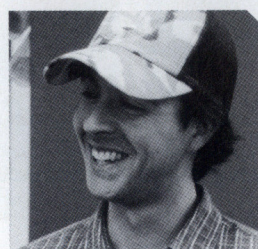
Online: ko-zee-ii



JAMES ELLIS

Lando. The Lionel Richie of Bespin, a cloud city probably rife with casinos, booze, busty wenches, he would've jived 'All night long' with every loose alien there... wow, I just had a kinky thought starring E.T... urgh!

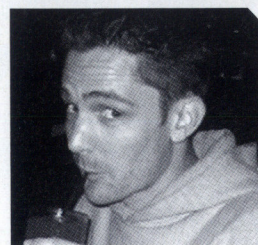
Online: gtfaster49



DAVID WILDGOOSE

The six online quizzes i just did claimed I am either Yoda, Obi-wan or Princess Leia. As three out of the six map me out as Leia, I guess i better go put on something pretty. I've been waiting for this moment...

Online: Goose



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Official Magazine - Australia

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SHOUT OUTS: Joel – let me join your football team, thanks for the stuff :: Heizy, we did it! :: Rockstar – ta dudes :: Jayde and Trish – we love you! :: Danni Bazzi – the sexiest man alive! :: Jenkins :: Phone home Damo, ta!

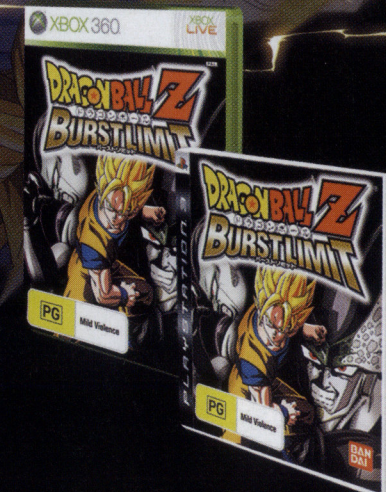
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PG

Mild Violence

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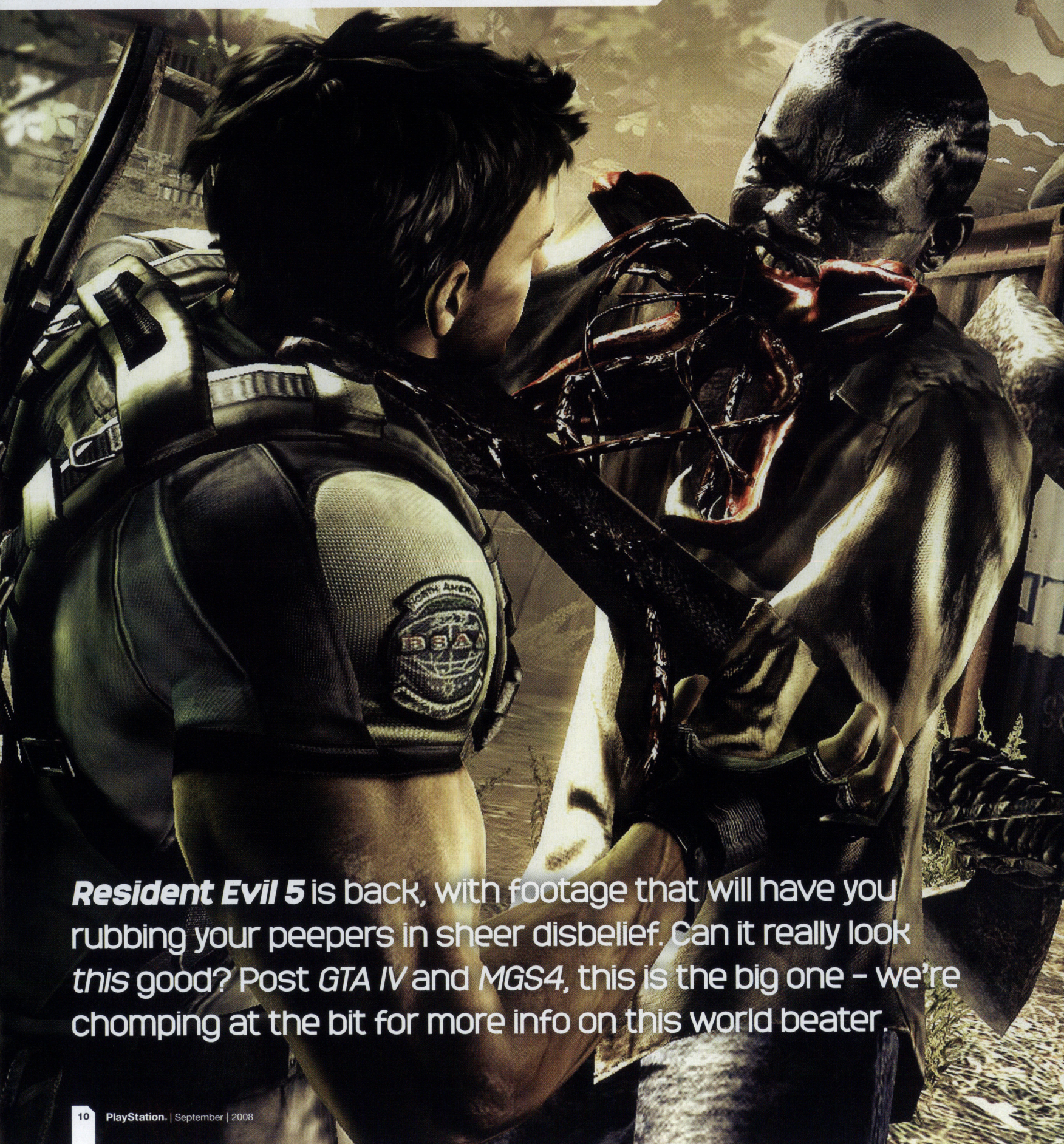
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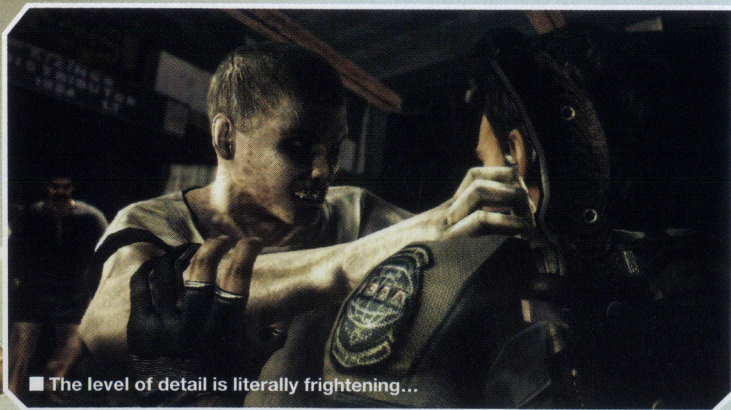
PLAYSTATION 3



SCREENSHOT OF THE MONTH



Resident Evil 5 is back, with footage that will have you rubbing your peepers in sheer disbelief. Can it really look *this* good? Post *GTA IV* and *MGS4*, this is the big one – we're chomping at the bit for more info on this world beater.



■ The level of detail is literally frightening...



■ Zombie dogs are back baby!



Gaming's latest and greatest...

BUZZ

Metal Gear Solid 4 flies off the shelves, anticipated PS3 exclusives canned, new PS3 controller? And much, much more...

■ That guy with the curly hair looks like my Gran... sorry but that is not a good look



■ "Heh heh. Let go... give it to me. I mean it. LET GO!"

1.3 MILLION COPIES!

MGS4 flies off the shelves...

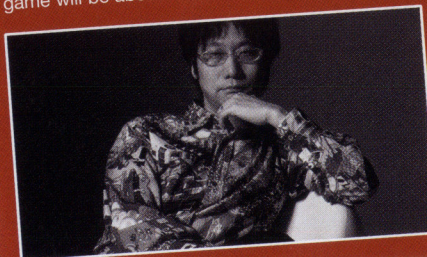
There were those who had the audacity to question the pulling power of Solid Snake – after the relative disappointment of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, the franchise's return to form, *Snake Eater*, didn't pull quite the same numbers as its predecessors.

But this was *MGS4*, a new game on a new format, and when the dust had settled, the facts were plain to see – *Metal Gear Solid 4* delivered, in a very big way. When Assistant Producer Ryan Payton claimed that *MGS4* would need to sell over a million copies day one to be considered successful many scoffed, but after reported day one sales of 1.3 million, critics are in the process of chomping down on a huge slice of humble pie.

And while more concrete sales of the game's Australian performance have yet to arrive, the game has increased PS3 sales by 180% in the US, and doubled sales of the console worldwide. All in all an incredible result for one of the undisputed games of the year so far...

MGS5?!

Bloody hell Hideo! Give a brother some time to finish the fourth already! Although *MGS4* will be the last time a *Metal Gear* game will feature Solid Snake as its protagonist, apparently Mr Kojima is already rattling around that huge brain of his in an attempt to come up with scenarios for the next game in the series. No-one so far, however, not even his own employees, has any idea whatsoever regarding what in the blue hell the game will be about. We await with baited breath.



SAY CHEESE...



One of the best features of *MGS4*, which has manifested itself on various forums (including our very own www.gameplayer.com.au) is the in-game camera, which can be used to take screenshots at any time during the game. This has mostly been used (predictably) to get some awesome camel toes shots of the 'beauties'. Not that we're complaining mind... here's an example that we've seen throughout the interwebz. Think you can do better – send them to us at ops@derwenthoward.com.au.

CANCELLED!

PS3 Exclusives *The Getaway* and *8 Days* get canned...

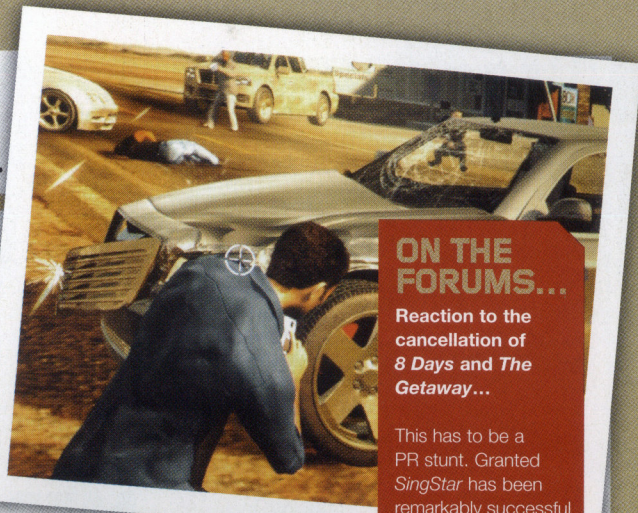
In news that has bemused many PS3 owners, previously MIA games *The Getaway* and *8 Days* were suddenly announced as being cancelled.

So what gives? Both titles were highly anticipated, and had huge amounts of cash behind their development, so why cancel two high profile exclusives so deep into the dev cycle?

Well, according to Shuhei Yoshida, replacement of perennial baldie Phil Harrison, both games did not fit Sony's new focus on using online technology, and bit the dust as a result. Apparently this is a

result of Sony's attempt to corner a different market by fusing casual gaming with the online functionality seen in titles such as *Buzz! Quiz TV*, *SingStar*, and the upcoming *LittleBigPlanet*.

Despite this reasoning, we find ourselves bemused with this decision – the console war will be fought and won by exclusives, and *The Getaway* in particular was a high profile example of a game that would only be seen on the PS3. Personally, we're sad to see the both of them go.



ON THE FORUMS...

Reaction to the cancellation of *8 Days* and *The Getaway*...

This has to be a PR stunt. Granted *SingStar* has been remarkably successful but I just don't believe that even Sony would cancel exclusive new games with fresh new concepts to get repetitive games out faster.

They should be grasping exclusives with both hands to keep pace with the competition. But then again they put a lot of their attention into *Haze* and look how that turned out.

Damolition

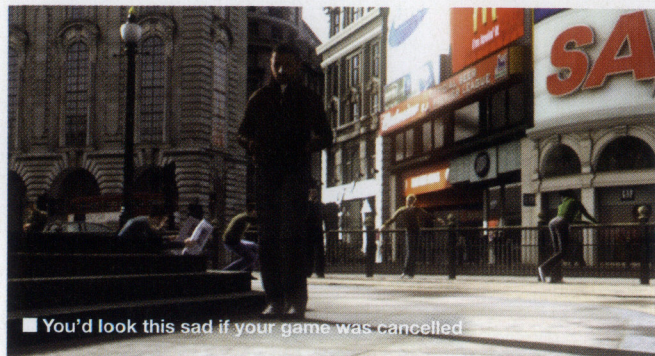
Sony is stopping production on exclusives? All I can say is WTF! **Tzar77**

Both games were looking awesome a few years ago... first time I've heard of them in a while.

Corder

Sony has their heads up their arse. They wonder why m\$ is killing them with exclusives? And why people like me buy a 360 after being Sony friendly all my gaming life? Only Snake can save us now...

Bagmup



■ You'd look this sad if your game was cancelled



■ "Hey Josh, stop listening to your iPod. It's rude." "So's your face"

SKATING ON THIN ICE

Activision considering 'board' peripheral for the latest *Tony Hawk*...



■ Man – doing hard time for hot chicks. Stay strong brave soldier.

The once legendary *Tony Hawk*'s franchise has hit hard times, with the last game being blitzed both critically and commercially by EA's *SKATE*.

As a result of this Activision and Neversoft have wisely made the decision to rebuild the entire *Tony Hawk*'s series from the ground up into an entirely new game. This was to be expected – but what we didn't expect was the rumor currently doing the rounds that Neversoft are considering

creating an all new balance board (like the one seen in *Wii Fit*) solely for their latest entry into the franchise.

We have no idea if this idea will actually come to fruition, but with the Wii version looking set to use the existing *Wii Fit* board, there is a strong possibility that Activision may want PS3 owners to partake in a similar experience. As soon as we get the official word we'll let you know.

WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

Resident Evil 5

The undisputed next big thing...

Pure

This is a genuine contender. Trust us.

Bad Company

The multiplayer is the bomb.com...

Singstar

We don't want to like it... but we do.

Echochrome

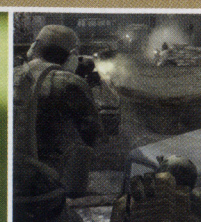
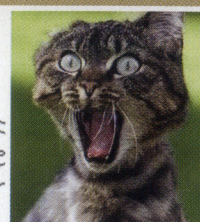
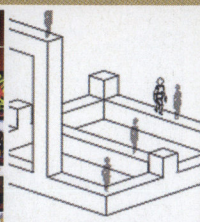
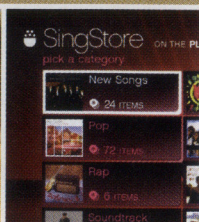
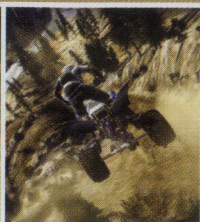
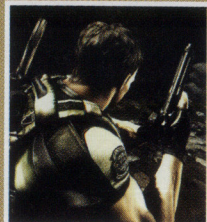
Argh... my brain. Stop making me use it!

New Controller?

Stop it! Now! We've suffered enough!

MGO Sign up

Ridiculously protracted and beyond stupid.



HOT!

NOT!

INFO NUDGE

Prodding you in the ribs with all the latest newsbites...

GOING LOCO

Finally! After the abortion that was the PSN *Loco Roco* game, Sony have announced the existence of a proper sequel to the original PSP classic. We know very little about this game outside the fact that it actually exists, but since we all fell thoroughly in love with those singing blobs of sunshine, we can't help but wait in earnest for the follow up!

PASSPORT TO EDEN

After the success of the almost perfectly balanced *Pixel Junk Monsters*, we've been a-hankering after another game of the *Pixel Junk* variety. Thankfully, as we've mentioned in previous issues, the team is currently hard at work on *Pixel Junk Eden*, a psychedelic platformer of sorts. We've recently been given word that a demo for the game will be uploaded to the PlayStation Network sometime in July.

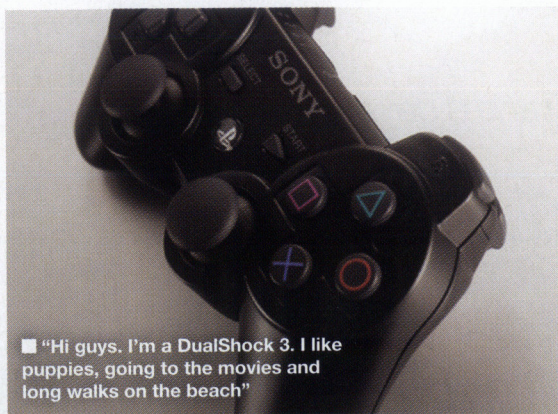
BRAND NEW

While Sony have often been (unfairly) accused of routinely nicking ideas from other companies, you may be surprised to hear that, according to an extensive poll conducted in the UK amongst people aged 18-65, Sony came at the very top of the list of most innovative company, beating out others such as Nintendo, Microsoft, and even Apple. Put that in your proverbial pipe and smoke it.

CALL OF DUTY: SCI-FI

This is one of those completely out of left field rumours that we kind of hope isn't true, but it's too big and important for us to ignore. The good news is that it probably won't happen.

The rumour itself came from talkplaystation.com, after an 'insider' at Infinity Ward claimed that the team were currently working on a Sci-fi shooter... hmmm. Watch this space for more info.



■ "Hi guys. I'm a DualShock 3. I like puppies, going to the movies and long walks on the beach"

MII TOO!

Sony considering a remote style controller?

Following fast on the news that Activision are considering creating a Wii-esque balance board for the latest *Tony Hawk's*, rumours abound that Sony are in the process of creating a new controller in the vein of Nintendo's Wii Remote.

These rumours originated from someone who claimed he had taken part in some focus testing with said PS3 controller, which apparently tested really well. Later the rumour compounded when it was claimed that certain developers already had this controller in their possession.

Look for an official announcement on this controller relatively soon, possibly during the upcoming E3 event in July.

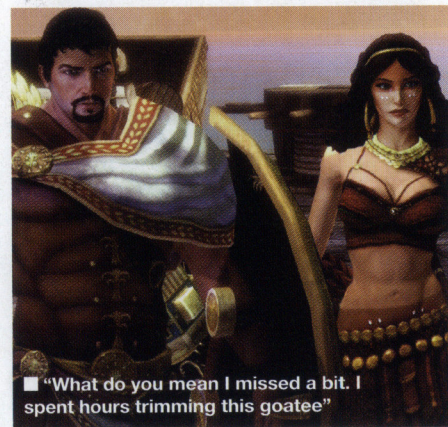
LEGENDARY?

Atari announce new 'revolutionary' RPG

Upon hearing the news that Atari were releasing a game steeped in Greek mythology, alarm bells were ringing – do we really need another action game in the vein of *God of War*?

But it turns out we were completely and utterly wrong – the upcoming *Rise of the Argonauts* just so happens to be a new RPG with some intriguing elements, including what is apparently a 'revolutionary' new dialogue system, and an all-new real time combat system.

Look for a fully fledged preview of this title in the very near future, but for now check out the official site www.rise-of-the-argonauts.com for more info.



■ "What do you mean I missed a bit. I spent hours trimming this goatee"

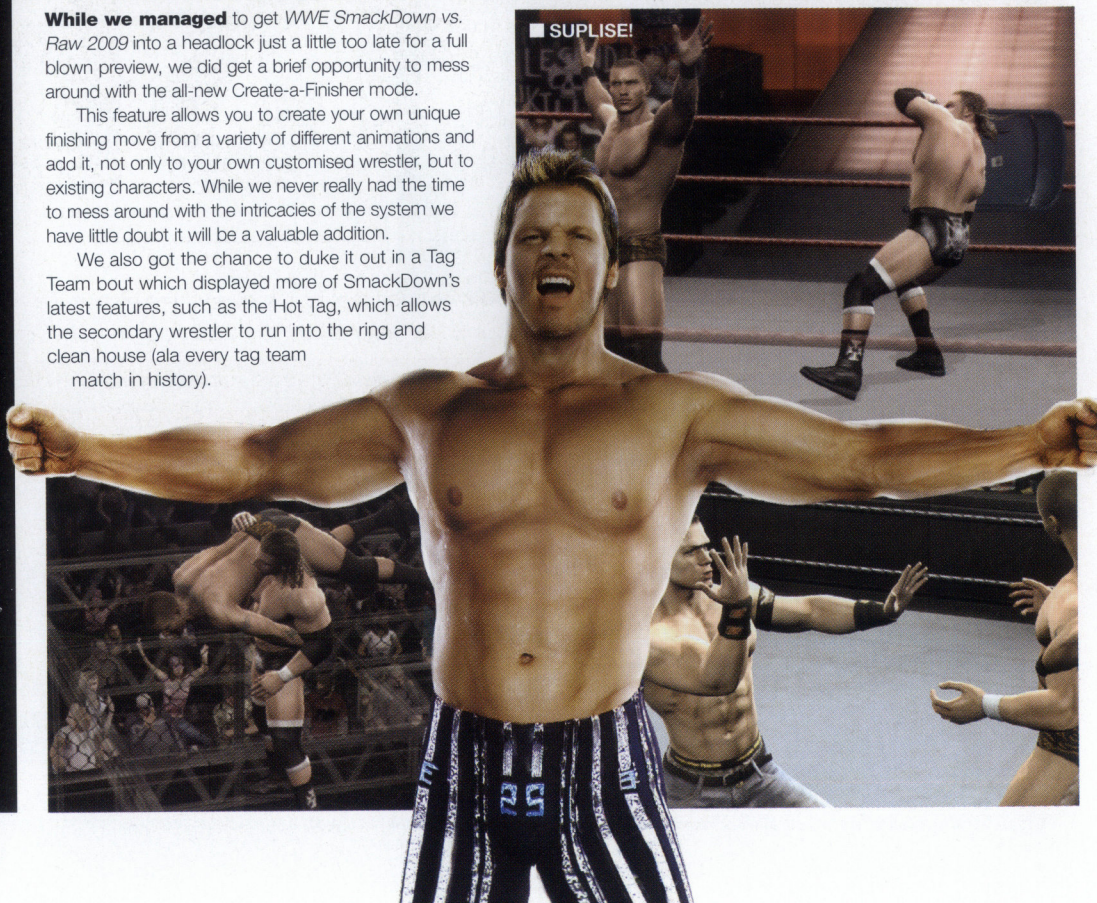
LAY THE SMACKDOWN...

With the latest WWE game from THQ

While we managed to get *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009* into a headlock just a little too late for a full blown preview, we did get a brief opportunity to mess around with the all-new Create-a-Finisher mode.

This feature allows you to create your own unique finishing move from a variety of different animations and add it, not only to your own customised wrestler, but to existing characters. While we never really had the time to mess around with the intricacies of the system we have little doubt it will be a valuable addition.

We also got the chance to duke it out in a Tag Team bout which displayed more of *SmackDown's* latest features, such as the Hot Tag, which allows the secondary wrestler to run into the ring and clean house (ala every tag team match in history).



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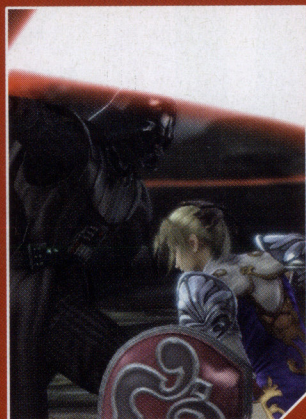
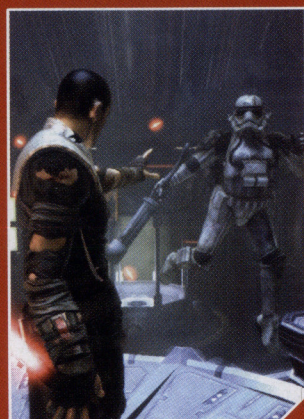
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TOP 10 GAMES CHART



Rank	Title	Category	Distributor
4	Singstar Vol. 2	Party	Sony
5	LEGO Indiana Jones	Action	Activision
6	The Bourne Conspiracy	Action	Vivendi
7	Civilization Revolution	Strategy	2K Games
8	Guitar Hero 3	Party	Activision
9	Assassin's Creed	Action	Ubisoft
10	Resistance: Fall of Man	Shooter	Sony

COMING SOON



Format	Title	Category	Distributor
JULY			
PS3	Buzz! Quiz TV	Party	Sony
PS3	DragonBall Z: Burst Limit	Fighting	Atari
PSP	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2	Fighting	Atari
PSP	Secret Agent Clank	Action	Sony
PSP	Echochrome	Puzzle	Sony
PS2	Pursuit Force Extreme Justice	Action	Sony

AUGUST			
PS3	Soulcalibur IV	Fighting	Ubisoft
PS3	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	Party	Activision
PS3	Madden NFL 09	Sports	EA
PS3	Hellboy: The Science of Evil	Action	Atari
PS3	Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	Shooter	Ubisoft
PS3	Ferrari Challenge	Racing	Red Ant
PS3	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2009	Sports	EA

SEPTEMBER			
PS3	Destroy All Humans: Path of the Furon	Action	THQ
PS3	SOCOM: Confrontation	Shooter	Sony
PS3	TNA IMPACT	Fighting	Red Ant
PS3	Midnight Club: Los Angeles	Driving	Rockstar
PS3	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	Action	Activision
PS3	Rise of the Argonauts	RPG	Atari



SQUEEGEE SPACE MARKING YOUR TERRITORY...

Do you love your PlayStation? How about your TV? Or perhaps your computer is your number one. Whatever your favourite gadget is, you treasure it. You've spent a few hundred, maybe even a few thousand dollars on a particular item, so of course you're going to want to take care of it. So unless you're an eccentric millionaire or an heiress, chances are that you will care a great deal when someone decides to poke their finger at your brand-new HDTV, or when and if they decide to use your Blu-ray discs as frisbees.

Yes, I'm talking about the pain of living with others. Whether it's siblings or housemates that don't know the difference between 'mine' and 'ours', I'm sure you feel the all-too-familiar feeling

of anxiety when the klutz comes within a metre radius of your beloved (and very expensive) new toy.

The solution? Take it with you. That's right, disconnect your PS3, put it in your man-bag and lug it around like you would your keys and wallet. Or, if you don't possess the endurance to accomplish such a feat of strength, perhaps you could invest in a padlock for your door. However, for those wishing to take a more subtle approach (and not offend those with whom you must reside), a simple (yet effective) way of telling others of keep their paws off your property is to mark it. That's right. Mark your territory.

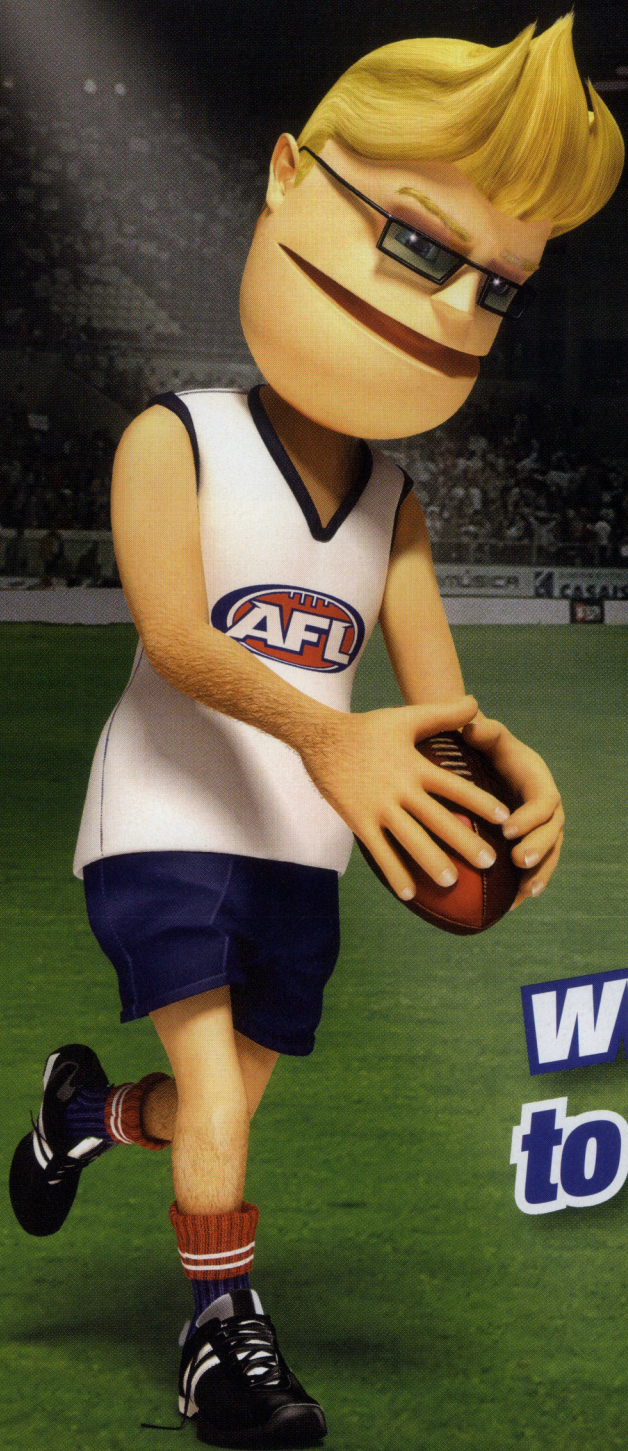
Now, how you do that is entirely up to you and your imagination. Gross.



■ You touch mine, i will definitely be breaking yours...



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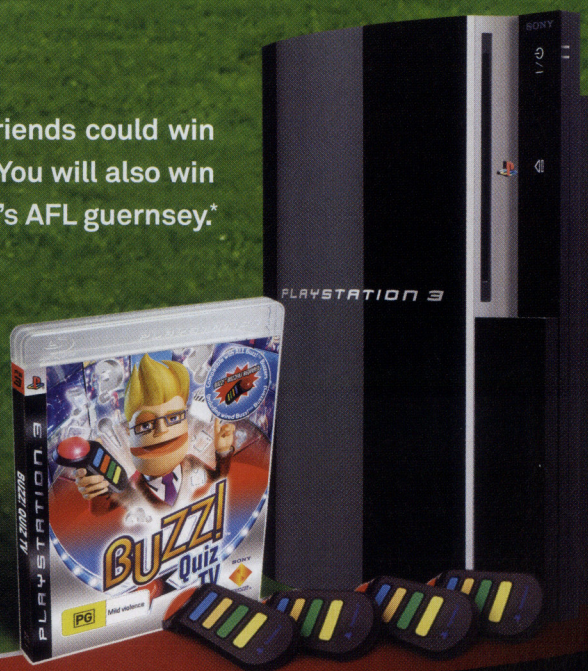
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PG

Mild violence



This is living




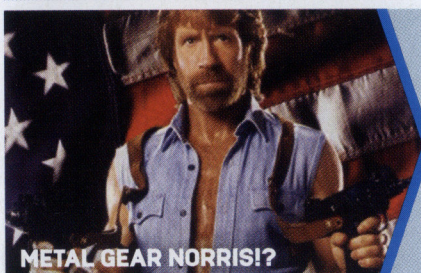

PLAYSTATION 3

What's next for our favourite games?

WHERE TO NOW?

It's a sad time for gaming, Kojima has stated (as he inevitably always does) that *MGS4* is the final game in the 'Solid' series, and while there will be other *Metal Gear* games, he will most likely not be at the helm. So what next for the series? Who will we be playing as and will the bloody thing work?



THE GAME?	EXPLAIN YOURSELF..	THE STORY	HOW WILL IT PLAY?	PROBABILITY
 <p>METAL GEAR RAIDEN!?</p>	<p>Raiden was the super fruity main character of <i>Metal Gear Solid 2</i>, but now he's a super awesome ninja! So it's okay! Am I right guys? Guys... ?</p>	<p><i>Step Up 3: Ninja Style</i> – Raiden meets a ballerina from the streets, and together they enter a break dancing contest 'in da hood', fighting Gekko via the lost art of 'dance fighting'. Actually, maybe a prequel about how he rescued Sunny from the Patriots may be more appropriate...</p>	<p>Like a cross between <i>Dance Dance Revolution</i> and <i>Ninja Gaiden</i> (Ninja Raiden anyone?). A dance mat peripheral will be totally optional...</p>	<p>Actually a regular <i>Metal Gear</i> Raiden game is a strong possibility... we'd play it.</p>
 <p>METAL GEAR THIS GUY!?</p>	<p>It makes perfect sense. First Snake was clean shaven (<i>MGS1</i>), then he had stubble (<i>MGS2</i>), and he eventually managed a fairly decent moustache in <i>MGS4</i>. Where else can we go from here but fully fledged beardage?</p>	<p>You've been flown direct into the heart of the Iraq with instructions to end terrorism via the unstoppable power of beard.</p>	<p>Maintaining and upgrading your beard power will be the order of the day – your facial hair must remain dense for power issues, but the more shaggy and unkempt it gets, the less control you have over said power. It's all a question of balance. A bushy, well trimmed beard is your ultimate goal.</p>	<p>Beards have always had a place in the series – why not create a game based around an ultimate legend of facial hair mastery?</p>
 <p>METAL GEAR SUNNY!?</p>	<p>Sunny is the daughter of the badass Olga from <i>Metal Gear Solid 2</i>, so there is a possibility that a raging, unstoppable war machine lays just beneath the surface...</p>	<p>Sunny decides to get revenge on the Patriots, who turned her mother into a cyborg ninja freak, by opening a restaurant and serving deadly, often burnt, poisonous fried eggs.</p>	<p>Like a warped version of <i>Cooking Mama</i>. You run a restaurant, and you have to simultaneously cook delicious meals for your paying customers, whilst slipping some rat poison into meals destined for members of the Patriots. Will you poison the wrong people?</p>	<p>Lower than a snake's belly... but maybe on Nintendo Wii?</p>
 <p>METAL GEAR NORRIS!?</p>	<p>You'd think we'd be sick of Chuck Norris by now (and we kinda should be) but the man deserves to feature in at least one video game. We think he'd be perfectly suited to <i>Metal Gear</i>.</p>	<p>Like <i>Delta Force</i> on roids... with a convoluted storyline that includes Chuck Norris traveling back in time to actually father himself, thus explaining the fact that he is a god amongst men: the father, the son, and the holy Chuck.</p>	<p>Like the greatest game ever made (so, much like <i>Metal Gear Solid 4</i>).</p>	<p>Solid Snake is pretty much the Chuck Norris of videogames, so we'd probably be retreading familiar ground.</p>
 <p>METAL GEAR AKIBA!?</p>	<p>Yeah, if you haven't completed <i>MGS4</i> and know Akiba only as a semi-retarded gibbon who is constantly shitting his drawers, then you may question the wisdom of this. But chill kids – hear us out on this one.</p>	<p>Someone has stolen Johnny Akiba's sunglasses and, since they are the sole source of his power, he now can't stop shitting himself. The hunt is on. Can Akiba find his sunnies before he runs out of clean underwear – time will tell.</p>	<p>Well similar to <i>MGS4</i>, with one very distinct difference – instead of having a 'psyche' meter, Johnny has a 'crap in his pants' meter. Any time his stress level gets too high he lays some pipe in his strides. You must avoid conflict, and avoid soiling your threads, at all costs.</p>	<p>We actually think that a new <i>Metal Gear</i> game with Akiba as the protagonist is a pretty solid bet – please God no...</p>

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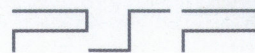
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COMPS

HOW TO ENTER

Send entries to ops@derwentthoward.com.au with the name of the competition in the subject line, or post them to *OFS Magazine*, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355 with the name of the competition CLEARLY MARKED on the envelope. Alternatively, head to www.gameplayer.com.au for details. Include the name of the competition, your name, age, email address, contact number, and more importantly, your full address and postcode! All competitions close on August 13th. All competitions are open to residents of Australia and New Zealand.

LIMITED TO THE CORE

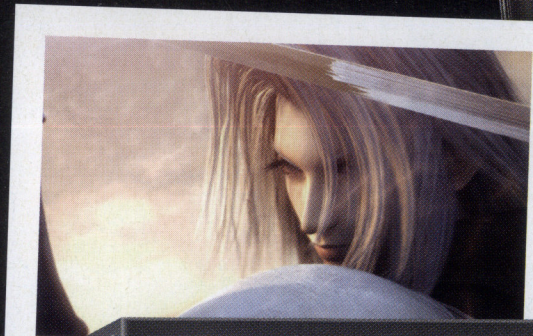
Grab a blade and help avert the crisis as second class SOLDIER Zack Fair tracks his missing Shinra comrades. Scandal, war and some old friends head your way in a game filled with hair product and totally hetero power surges in *Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core*.

This game was released to celebrate *FFVII*'s 10th anniversary and as such only 77,777 of these Limited Edition PSP packs have been released. We have one Limited silver PSP up for grabs along the Soundtrack, Lithograph and Artbook for a super lucky reader. Plus, five runners-up will nab the game, lithograph and Artbook.

To be one of the blessed few make sure you follow the above instructions and answer the below question correctly. Send your entries labeled 'Crisis Core giveaway'.

Question: Which of these characters does NOT appear in *FFVII: Crisis Core*?

- A Aerith Gainsborough
- B Cloud Strife
- C Kimahri Ronso



DUDE LOOKS LIKE A LADY!

The bad boys from Boston have thrown on their tight pants and are busting their heavy metal glam all over the PlayStation 3.

Pick up those guitars and get ready to play through *Aerosmith* hits such as *Livin' on the Edge* and *Love in an Elevator* in *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith*. There are also songs from *The Cult*, *New York Dolls*, *Cheap Trick*, *Lenny Kravitz* and *The Kinks*.

Just because we actually wanted to be rockers (and failed!!!) we're giving one reader the chance to win an Epiphone Les Paul model guitar valued

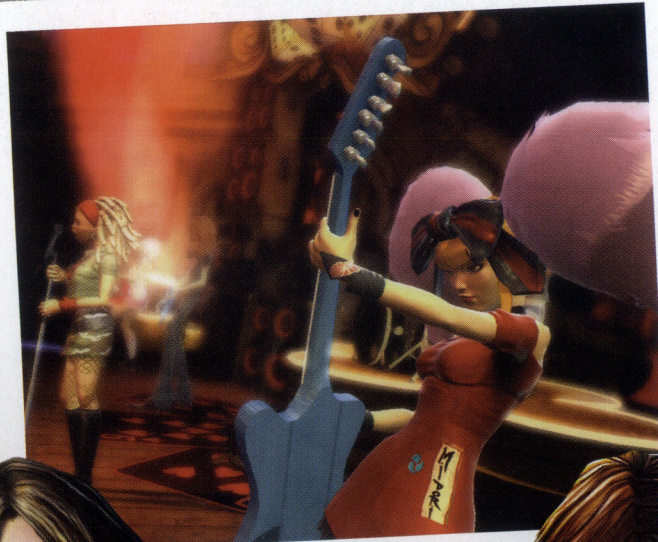
\$1,299 with hard case, a copy of the game and *The Very Best Of Aerosmith* on CD.

Plus nine runners-up will grab the game and the CD!

To prove your rock god status follow the instruction on page 20 and send your entries to 'Guitar Hero giveaway', along with the answer to the below question.

Question: Which was NOT an Aerosmith hit?

- A Cryin'
- B Cringe
- C Crazy



Epiphone
performance is our passion

WIN!

PLAYSTATION



M Moderate Violence



YOU'RE IN BAD COMPANY

Welcome to the world of Preston Marlowe! You know from birth he was shit outta luck with that name. He's joined the 222nd Army battalion aka B-Company. They're a bunch of misfits and they're going AWOL in order to scam some personal gains.

We're all for personal gain at OPS, so we've decided to hand over 10 copies of the game *Battlefield: Bad Company* to the reader who can answer the simple question below.

Then send your entry labeled 'Bad Company Giveaway' to the address listed on page 20 and get yourself ready to blow some shit up! Ooh ra!

Question: Battlefield: Bad Company takes place in the fictional Eastern European country of...?

- A Serkozache
- B Belarus
- C Estonia



BRUISING IN BRUGES

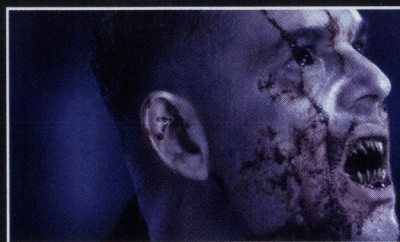
This film has everything: Colin Farrell, shoot-outs and a dwarf!

In Bruges is the darkly comedic tale of the fates of hit men Ray (Colin Farrell) and Ken (Brendan Gleeson). After a difficult job in London, the team is ordered by their boss Harry (Ralph Fiennes) to cool their heels in Bruges. Very much out of their comfort zones, the men find themselves drawn into increasingly dangerous entanglements with locals, tourists, and a film shoot. Soon, their perspectives on life and death are violently skewed.

To win one of 10 packs that includes a double pass to see *In Bruges* and a DVD pack with *30 Days Of Night* extended edition, *Alpha Dog* and *Apocalypse*. Follow the instructions on page 20 and send your entry with the correct answer to the below question to 'In Bruges Giveaway'.

Question: Colin Farrell was born in?

- A Scotland
- B Ireland
- C Mexico



WIN!



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PG

Mild Violence

HE'S SUAVE AND SOPHISTICATED
HE KNOWS FINE WINES AND FAST CARS
WOMEN THROW THEMSELVES AT HIM
(YUP HE'S THE ONE ON THE RIGHT)

RATCHET IS IN PRISON FOR A CRIME HE DIDN'T COMMIT, CLANK'S NOW TAKEN THE LEAD;
IS RATCHET DOOMED? THE RATCHET AND CLANK FRANCHISE IS BACK,
BUT WITH A SPY THEMED TWIST. PACKING A DEVASTATING SELECTION OF NEW WEAPONS AND GADGETS,
AND DRESSED TO IMPRESS. WILL CLANK RISE TO THE OCCASION TO SAVE HIS FRIEND?



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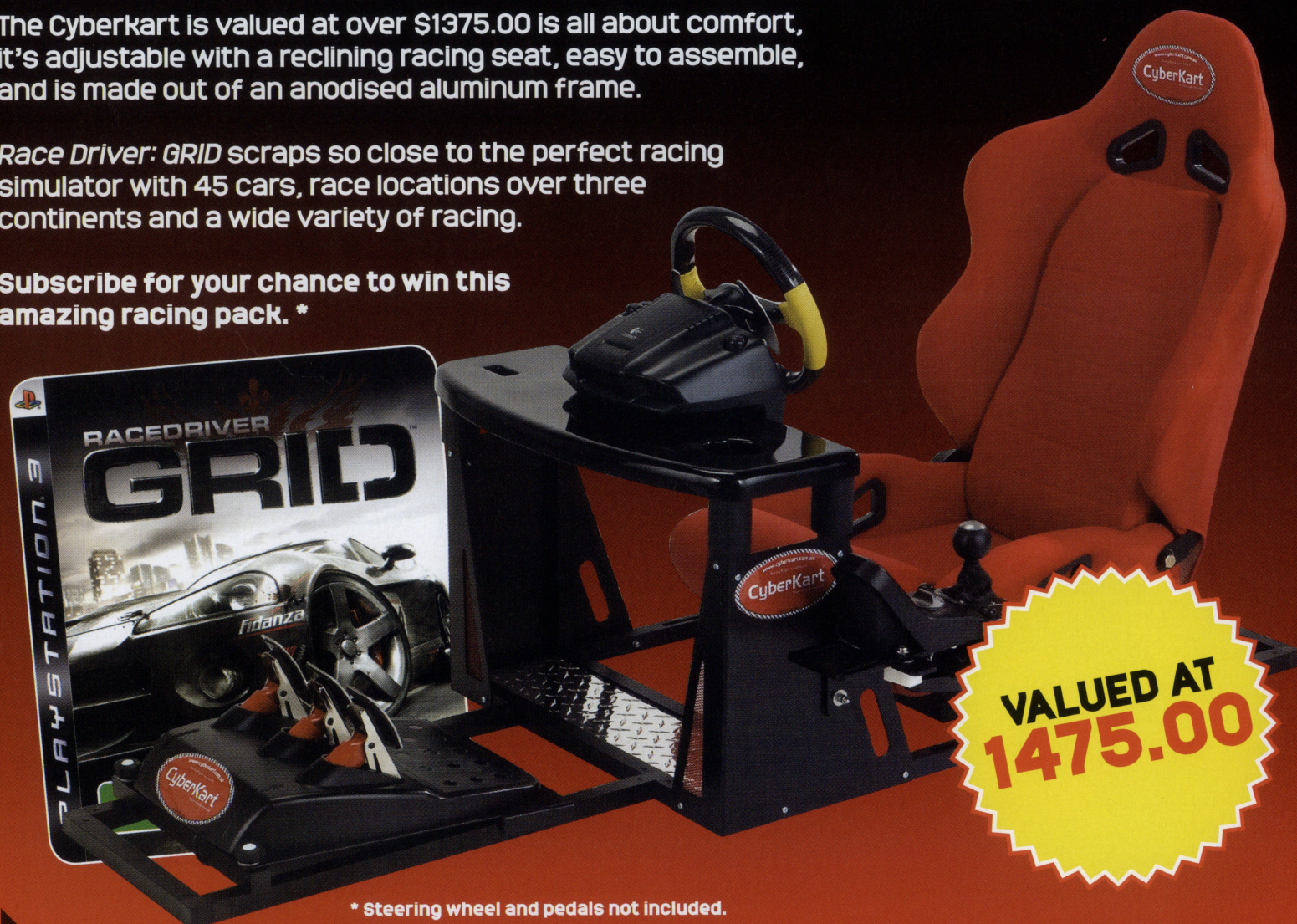
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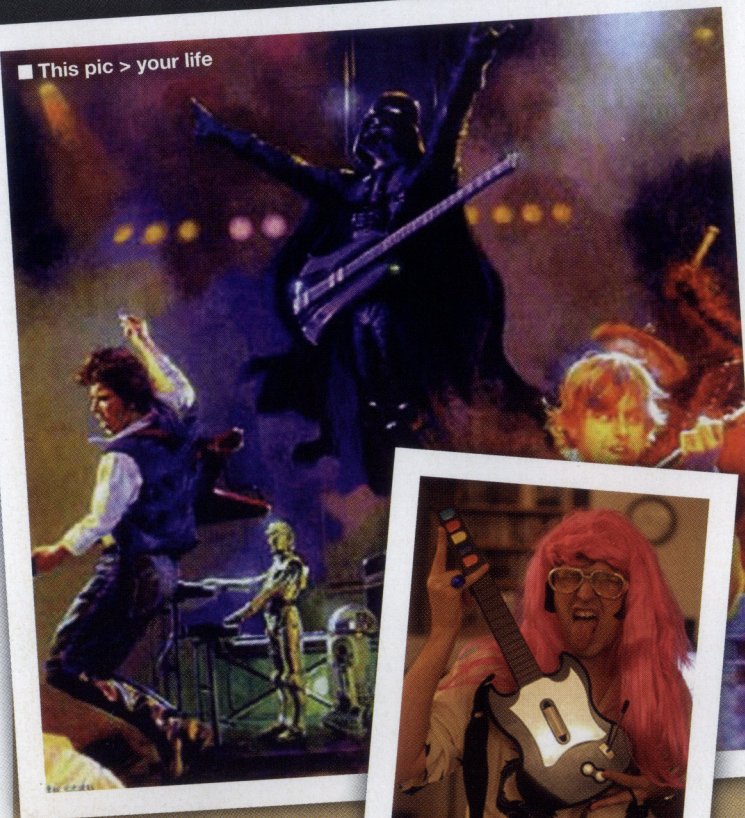
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LETTERS

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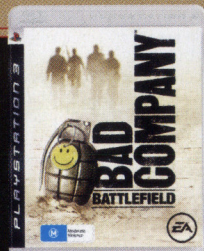
LETTER OF THE CENTURY

TO ROCK OR NOT TO ROCK

The OPS mag has painted such beautiful picture of both *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero World Tour*. Both games with virtually the same concept, with the exception of *GHWT* where you can record your sessions and upload them, and with *Rock Band* probably being released a lot sooner. You would have to agree that there would be no point owning both games. So having never disagreed with a single word ever written by you guys ever, should I wait for the slightly better sounding *Guitar Hero* or should I just get the gold awarded *Rock Band*. Yours forever...

Tadd Alexander, via email

It's a very real problem Tadd. Rock Band or Guitar Hero World Tour, and with no release date in sight for the former, you could be forgiven for saying that EA have missed the boat. GHWT has the stronger brand, what is quite possibly looking like the better equipment, and a whole heap of creative modes. However we say, when it comes to games of this ilk, it all comes down to song choice. GHWT has exceeded all our expectations in some areas, but Rock Band continues to impress us with the frequency of its downloadable content. Our verdict? Wait for a full GHWT tracklist before deciding.



WINNER!

Letter of the month wins a copy of *Battlefield: Bad Company!* (disclaimer: not based on the band)

■ We honestly don't know how to feel about this pic...



GIRL TROUBLE

Hi guys... and girls it would seem. I think it's great you have a female editor – girls kick ass, and no, I'm not a girl – I'm a man, baby. And as a man some of us get married, so I come back to my previous statement – girls kick ass. I'm not sucking up either trying to convince the other half to let me buy *MGS4* when I "just got *GTA IV* and I haven't even finished that". Alright, better go! Great mag, great writers, and fantastic editor but I really should put that washing in the dryer before I get my ass kicked.

Adam, via email

Trust us Adam. It's only been two months, and the entire team has had to get used to getting their ass kicked by a girl ("cough" VANESSA "cough"). Anyway, got to go. Vanessa's demanding yet another cup of coffee – and her face isn't going to fan itself.

SNAKE... WHAT HAPPENED?

Hey OPS, please don't hate me for what I'm about to ask, but... what is so good about *MGS4*? There I said it! Don't get me wrong, I love the series, even though I've never played it, but all I've seen from

gameplay videos is Snake walking around and camouflaging himself. What else is there? How does it keep on innovating again and again?

Dominik, via email

Dominik, Dominik, Dominik. Really? Are those words really coming out of your mouth? "I love the series, even though I've never played it?" Come on man! You've upset everyone, especially Mark – he's curled up into a fetal ball of barely contained bubonic rage. But to be fair, Metal Gear Solid 4 isn't for everyone, as we said in our review it's a love or hate thing. We just happen to love it,

HAZY

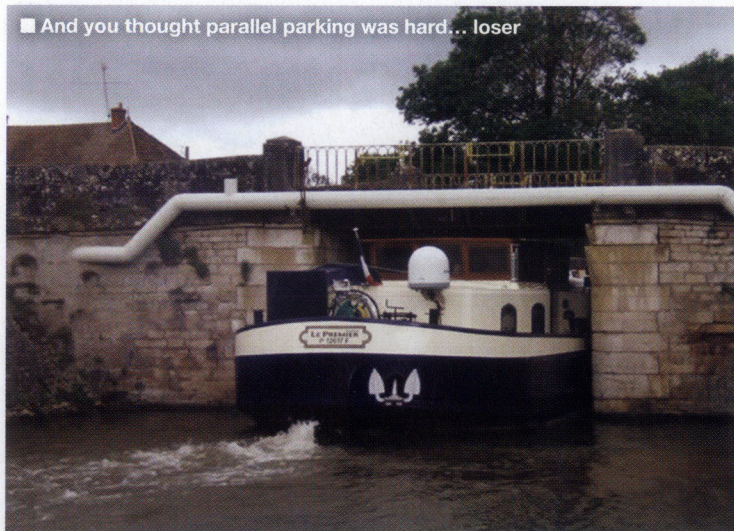
I don't want you guys to feel bad or anything but... why is it that reviews sometimes come out late? I mean we'll take last issue for instance... *Haze* was released on 21st May, magazine out on 28th May... are there some restrictions that don't allow you to publish a review in a magazine that is within a certain time bracket or something? Cause not that it's your fault; but it's bloody annoying, especially when we have to wait almost an entire month after a game is released before we hear what you guys reckon of it. And trust me; your word means a lot. If you say *Haze* is shit; you'd better believe it comes straight off my to-buy list. Oh and this isn't a complaint, just wondering what the deal is.

Damien, via email

■ Indy – he hates snakes, even solid ones...



■ And you thought parallel parking was hard... loser



Glad you asked Damien – we'd like to clear a few things up on this count. Magazines take a while to print basically, which results in a bit of a lead time. We work hard to get reviews out on time, and with a few exceptions we usually get them out on time, but often publishers are a bit late in getting copies to us. With Haze in particular the copies came in very late – possibly because Ubisoft didn't want the game to get reviewed in the first place (Oooh burn...) since the game had some hype around it, and they didn't want that hype to flounder as a result of negative reviews.

HARD DRIVIN'

Ever since I picked up my PS3 I've had this nagging feeling that I might be caught up short by a lack of memory. Installations, trailers, demos, and PSN games keep chomping down on my ever-decreasing stash of potential storage. And with the MGS4's supposed 4.5 Gigs of download, I'm beginning to panic. So what do I do? I figure I have three options. The first is to go through at certain intervals and wipe all of my saved games, installed games, downloaded games and content, and other stuff to make room for new stuff. But I'd don't want to do that because I still like to go back to my old games later

on. The third is to buy external memory, sorta like the memory cards of yesteryear. My final option is possibly illegal, probably dangerous, and likely to be very costly, and as such I won't really go into it any more than to say it rhymes with sodding. But if that's my only choice....

Spencer Thew, via email

Ah Spencer, you appear to be in the foul clutches of a common problem methinks. Our very own Mark Serrels in the same boat, since he only has a paltry 20Gig of memory on his PS3. You really have two options. The easiest solution is to simply delete the game installs on the game data once you've finished playing them. Then if you want to play the game later, it's a simple case of reinstalling the game. Another option is to buy a new hard drive. The PS3 is compatible with most Hard Drives and the PS3 instruction manual actually shows you how to install one. Give it a bash.

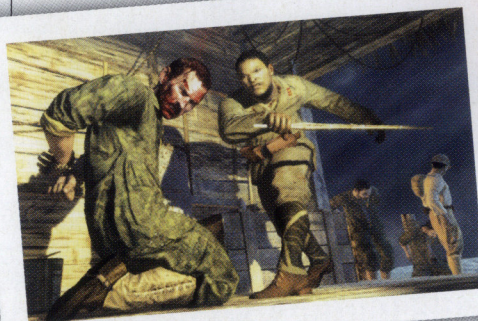
MISSING IN ACTION

Hey OPS, I have owned all PlayStation consoles, and have bought all of the Call of Duty titles, which might I add are fantastic, and was very excited to hear about Call Of Duty: World at War. I sat down to read my mag and

I see 'Call Of Duty 5: World At War, War in Australia's backyard' I was so excited I could hardly control myself, but when I got to the article I was very disappointed to hear that our Armed Forces were not going to be featured in it. Don't get me wrong I have thoroughly enjoyed playing as all of the other Armed Forces but when will our soldiers finally get the respect they deserve? As the best trained Army in the world, with the most elite special forces group, you would think that would entitle us to being in a game. Apparently not. I am still looking forward to all the new features, and finally getting to be a Russian again, but when will we finally get our part? This was also the issue with Call Of Duty 4, I heard SAS and thought well seeing as we have the best SAS in the world we are entitled to play a role, but they picked the British SAS. I still enjoyed finally getting to play as a well trained soldier but it would have been nice to be an Australian. So when I read about COD: WAW on the internet I finally thought we would get what we deserve, a place in the best warfare franchise, but no. Next time you talk to anyone from the Call Of Duty franchise ask them if there will ever be a place for Australia. This is just a tiny issue in an otherwise really good looking game. You are doing a great job on the mag, keep doing what you are doing.

Amos Brookes, via email

A lot of truth being spoken/written in that email Amos. We were also pretty disappointed that Australian soldiers won't be featured in the upcoming Call of Duty: World at War. The only consolation is that, as an FPS, character involvement is minimal, so it won't impact on us too much, really...



CUTTINGS

Delicious bite-sized letter morsels that are easy to swallow

LEGO METAL GEAR?

What I'd really LOVE to see is Metal Gear Lego! Covering all 4 games. A little comedy stealth Lego game featuring the solid one.

Mark, via email

Maybe we could combine LEGO Indiana Jones with LEGO Metal Gear... because we all know that Indy hates Snakes (sorry!)

THE NAME GAME

What the hell is your problem with names? My mum's name is Iona, I'm Sergy. Please put this in the cutting's so people know that issue 17's letter was mine, not my mum's.

Iona, via email

Sorry about that dude! Won't happen again old bean!

MEBBE...

Are you guys doing a piece on The Sims 3 in your magazine anytime soon?

Ashley, via email

It hasn't actually been announced for the PS3, but we're sure it'll hit consoles at some point – when it does, we'll be there.

GENIUS!

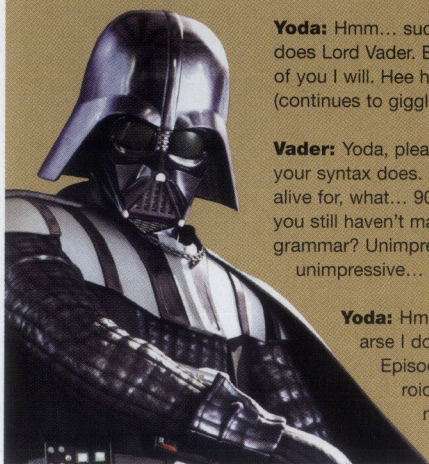
Hideo Kojima is a deadset genius! MGS4 game of the freaking century!

Jon, via email

You're preaching to the converted Jonny boy – we couldn't agree more! It's definitely up there with some of the best games ever made...

INSIDE GAMING

We catch Yoda and Darth Vader arguing about who has the best character in Soulcalibur IV...



Yoda: Hmm... suck your character does Lord Vader. Beat crap out of you I will. Hee hee hee hee. (continues to giggle incessantly...)

Vader: Yoda, please. Suck balls your syntax does. You've been alive for, what... 900 years? And you still haven't mastered basic grammar? Unimpressive... most unimpressive...

Yoda: Hmm... but kick arse I do – like in Episode 2, hmm? Like roided up spider monkey I fight, hmmm?

Vader: Yeah, and how stupid does that look, you retarded Chihuahua? I literally laughed out loud when I watched you pull that crap on Count Dooku I almost pissed in my popcorn. Look man, let's face facts – I'm the freakin' Lord of Darkness, baby, and you've barely evolved above the level of a feral rodent. Why anyone would choose you as their Soulcalibur character is beyond me.

Yoda: Bu- bu- bu- but! My mideochorean count! High it is! Much power I have!

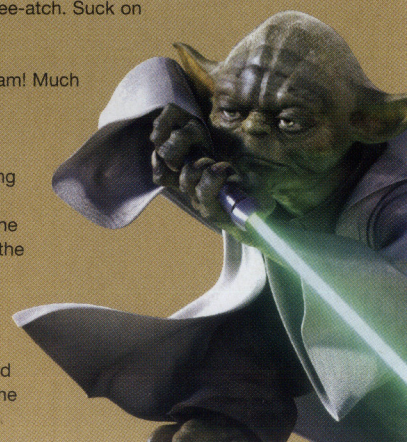
Vader: Wrap it – I was born of the

mideochoreans bee-atth. Suck on that Granddad.

Yoda: But wise I am! Much knowledge I have!


(Vader bursts out force choke, leaving Yoda coughing and spluttering... he eventually falls to the ground lifeless)

Vader: Man, I'm hungry. Is there a KFC around here? I gotta get me some chicken.



REVENGE OF THE SITH

Becoming a Jedi takes the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. Adventure... excitement... a Jedi craves not these things...



Well good thing we're not Jedi's then, eh? Because if you're looking for adventure and excitement, you could do far worse than checking out *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, an extremely promising title that takes the mind blowing Euphoria engine and applies it to the rich history of the *Star Wars* Universe.

And trust us, we've played it, and were thoroughly impressed with the direction this game has taken. Despite the pent up frustration of years of lame prequels coursing through our veins, we found ourselves having an absolute

ball with *The Force Unleashed*. And who wouldn't; never before have we seen a *Star Wars* game that takes such perverse delight in the destructive elements of the force – it revels in the dark power only hinted at in the movies, and as a result becomes a visual feast of unfettered carnage.

It plays smoothly too – the first section in particular has a brilliant weight to it, as you clump through the environment as a particularly grumpy Darth Vader, laying waste to all in your path. So it's almost jarring when you switch over to playing as Vader's secret apprentice – whereas Vader himself is all about a slow paced, impending menace, the Apprentice is a little spider monkey, light on his feet, and less powerful in the beginning. It's almost as if Lucasarts provide you with Vader as an example of what you could become as the apprentice should you persevere...

But even in the beginning, there's plenty you can do in the expansive environment – one memorable scene had us ripping Tie Fighters from the ceiling, before launching them indiscriminately at friend and foe. There's a brilliant balance here – you consistently find yourself feeling like the baddest man in the universe, yet the overwhelming amounts of intelligent enemies provide a real challenge for you and your newfound force abilities.

But enough about us, and our impressions – we got exclusive interviews with Haden Blackman, the major creative 'force' behind the *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, and got the chance to for a chinwag with numerous members of the cast, including Sam Witwer (playing as the Apprentice) the indelibly hot Nathalie Cox (Juno Eclipse) and Adrienne Wilkinson (the unannounced character of Maris Brood).



■ A lightsaber up the arse. It burns.



■ "I regret nothiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing..."



■ If having the hots for this alien chick is wrong, then we don't wanna be right...



■ Whoa man. Bad trip.



■ "Hahah! Put me down. That tickles!"

Haden Blackman

To be perfectly honest, it's been a while since we've seen a truly barnstorming *Star Wars* game. Can you tell us what it is about *The Force Unleashed* that we should be getting hyped about?

Five words: Kicking ass with the Force. We've been talking about it for a while, but now that we're nearing the end of the project I think that this core mechanic really is going to provide a fun and compelling experience.

There's also the really great story we're telling – this truly is a new chapter in the *Star Wars* saga, and people will think about the original trilogy in a new light after they play *The Force Unleashed*.

Can you get into detail about the new engines used in *The Force Unleashed*, and how they will affect gameplay?

There's a whole lot going on underneath the hood in *The Force Unleashed*.

First, we built our own new game engine from scratch at LucasArts, which includes an all-new renderer and the combination of several physics systems rolled into one. Several of these technologies have never been seen before together in a game. Here's a rundown...

Euphoria – We collaborated with Natural Motion to integrate euphoria, which gives all the characters in *The Force Unleashed* a digital nervous system. They want to survive, they want to stay upright, and the way they react isn't always scripted or hand-animated, it's simulated.

So you might throw a crate at a Stormtrooper one time and he'll jump out of the way just in time. The next time he'll get hit by it, but won't fall over, it'll just knock him off balance

them, and that you'll be able to bash open doors by picking up an enemy and throwing him at the door, bending it enough to get through.

Havok – Havok is our underlying physics system and allows us to move a large number of objects all at once using big, over-the-top powers like Force Repulse.

How has working within the *Star Wars* universe

“This truly is a new chapter in the *Star Wars* saga, and people will think about the original trilogy in a new light after they play”

affected development of the game? Has it been restrictive? Liberating? A bit of both?

We've been fortunate that George Lucas has given us a pretty blank slate for the game. There haven't been very many stories told in this time period between *Episodes III* and *IV*, so we had the chance to get really creative.

He gave us advice on how to use some of the characters, and a download about what's going on in the galaxy during this era. He also encouraged us to create new characters that fit familiar roles (like a love interest). We were also given a lot of freedom to portray the Force in a way that made sense for this game.

Can you tell us a bit about the different kinds of force powers and how they'll be used in the game?

The Apprentice has a number of powers, starting with Force Push, which is the staple ranged power in the game. Rather than just knock enemies down, though, Force Push has been reimagined so that every time you use it, it hits enemies with the force of a cannonball and sends them flying backwards. You can also

use it to blast your way through doors and other obstacles. The Apprentice also learns to use Force Lightning, Lightsaber Throw, and – perhaps our favorite – Force Grip, which allows you to pick up many objects and enemies, move, throw, and slam them into each other or nearby hazards. We created some new powers that are logical extensions of the Force: Repulse sends out a shockwave that hurls enemies and objects away from you, and Lightning Shield surrounds you with crackling energy to increase your damage and reduce the damage that you take. As the Apprentice grows in power, all of his

powers can be upgraded and will gain new properties. An upgraded Force Lightning will chain between enemies, for example.

We also treated the lightsaber as its own power in many respects. You can unlock dozens of combos that combine lightsaber attacks – lightsaber attacks with Force powers, or even Force powers with other Force powers. And finally, the Apprentice has passive “talents” that players can purchase and upgrade as they advance through the game – things like increasing the Apprentice’s health or ability to reflect blaster bolts while blocking.

We think there’s quite a bit of depth to our upgrade system, and the range of powers and other abilities should satisfy nearly any play-style. If you want to be “run and gun,” you can focus on Force Push and Lightning. If you prefer a more methodical, long-range approach, you can upgrade your grip and lightsaber throw.

He’s a busy man, of course, but has George Lucas had any feedback regarding the game, or any input into the development?

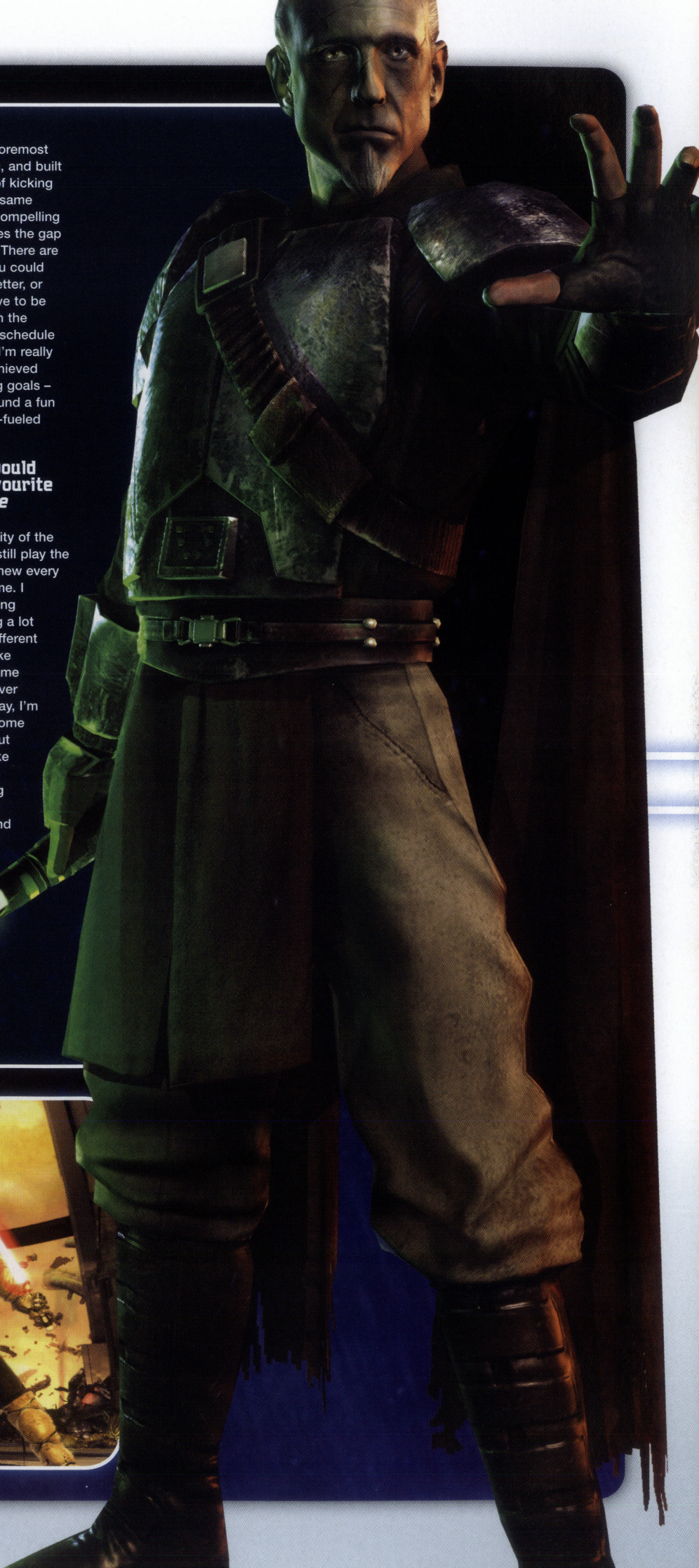
George was actively involved at the start of the project. We met with him several times as we were developing the story, and he had a lot of input about the characters and their motivations. He also drove us to create new characters, and give the Apprentice some companions on his journey, which is how Juno Eclipse, his pilot, and PROXY, his droid sidekick, came about.

Now that you’re into the last months of development on the title, do you feel like you’ve achieved all the goals you set out to achieve? Is there anything you feel that’s missing?

Our goal was to first and foremost make a game that was fun, and built around the core concept of kicking ass with the Force. At the same time, we wanted to tell a compelling *Star Wars* story that bridges the gap between the two trilogies. There are always things you wish you could have done differently or better, or early design ideas that have to be cut when you’re faced with the realities of the tech or the schedule or the budget, but overall I’m really happy with what we’ve achieved and feel that we hit our big goals – a good story wrapped around a fun game with plenty of Force-fueled ass-kicking.

Personally, what would you say is your favourite aspect of *The Force Unleashed*.

Probably the unpredictability of the game. The fact that I can still play the game and see something new every time is pretty amazing to me. I also find that I’m discovering new tactics, experimenting a lot with the environment or different play-styles – I never feel like I’m in a rut or doing the same repetitive thing over and over again. Beyond the gameplay, I’m very happy with the way some of the characters turned out – I think new characters like Juno Eclipse, PROXY, and Jedi Master Kota are going to be very memorable and will hopefully live on beyond the game.



Sam Witwer

So Sam, you just so happen to be playing a character in one of the most celebrated franchises in history - how does it feel? Is there any pressure, excitement? Nerves?

Pressure? Yes. Excitement? Sure. Nerves? You bet.

Why? Because I've been a *Star Wars* fan for as long as I've been alive so I know first hand how much the fans care about that mythology. With *The Force Unleashed* we're telling a story that lives in the heart of that mythology. It had better be right. The character better feel right. If we're gonna wave our hands around and have the audacity to state that "*The Force Unleashed* IS the new chapter in the *Star Wars* Saga," well then we'd better have something special to show for it. I think we do.

So tell me a bit about your character? How did it feel to play the secret apprentice of Darth Vader?

Okay. I'm gonna give you a little trade secret. We came up with this formula for the Apprentice. He's one part Luke Skywalker, two parts Han Solo, one part Darth Maul, and one part Indiana Jones. How's that for a fanboy answer? Yep. That's what they pay us for.

In all seriousness, we really wanted to create a dimensional character. I wanted to avoid the trap of creating a one note performance and I really hope I succeeded. I guess we'll have to wait and see.

As for who he is? He's a confused, scared kid who, in his own way, is trying to do the right thing. The problem is that his moral role model is Darth Vader. As a result of this, his compass does not face due north.

How did it feel? It was fun. Way too much fun.

How did you approach the job itself? Was it a case of just going with your instincts?

Instincts are essential. So is homework. Fortunately, most of my homework was already taken care of having been raised a *Star Wars* fan. However, there are things that might slip by if one were not paying attention.

For example, remembering that *Star Wars* originated from film serials of the 1930s, I had to remind myself to be somewhat

more theatrical than I'm used to being, which is scary when you're on a blank motion capture stage saying these over-the-top lines about space wizards and ray guns. The instinct is almost to pull back. Protect your performance. Not look silly. But no! That's wrong! It's *Star Wars*. It's bigger than life. It's faster, more intense.

What are some of the differences between doing voice acting on a video game vs. any other kind of acting job, say on television?

Well, this wasn't just a voice acting gig. Certainly there's a lot of voice over in the game and that much was a new experience for me. "Scream Sam! Now scream different!" However, there's an hour of cinematic material in this game that we shot using facial motion capture. That shoot was very similar to my film and television experience aside from having a bunch of shiny dots placed all over my face. It was very similar to a greenscreen shoot where most or all of the environment will be plugged in later.

What's important, though, is that the actors were there and they were good. As an actor you really need your co-stars to work off of. If you don't have that, then your job becomes four times as difficult. The cast was great. Nathalie, Adrienne, and Cully really knew their characters. Jimmy Smits really brought something special and was a joy to work with. My buddy David Collins created a very endearing character in Proxy. It was fun to work with those personalities.

We also had the benefit of Haden Blackman's clarity of vision, the importance of which cannot be overstated. The guy knows what he's doing.

Have you seen much of the game itself?

Well... how do I answer this? Over the last year I've been in and out of LucasArts visiting the team and watching this whole thing unfold. Last month I was invited to the Letterman Digital Arts Center to sit in one of Lucasfilm's giant theaters and watch the cinematics on the big screen. Following that, I was given the opportunity to play the game for four hours.

So what do I have to say?

I think people are gonna lose their minds. Without a doubt.

Nathalie Cox

Nathalie, you don't strike us as your typical *Star Wars* fan (ie you're pretty hot) how did you go about getting the role? And was it everything you expected or hoped it would be?

Thank you very much for the compliment! But I have to disagree with you slightly on one point - I don't think there is such a thing as a 'typical' *Star Wars* fan! That's

the beauty of it - it's universal. All sorts of different people of different ages love it. I was a *Star Wars* fan before I started working on the game (although I must admit, not anywhere near as big a fan as Sam Witwer, who plays the Apprentice). When my agent told me about the audition, and after reading some of the scenes from the script, straight away I knew that this was a project that I really, really wanted to be a part of. The whole thing has gone beyond my wildest dreams - it really has been the most amazing experience.



■ "It's not you it's me... and those weird horns sticking out of your head. Yeah, they're a little distracting..."

Adrienne Wilkinson

So Adrienne, we know absolutely nothing about your character - what gives? Why is it such a secret?

Hmmm, what can I say? Doesn't an air of mystery make a woman more appealing? Well, I'll gladly share what I can. I play Maris Brood. She's sexy and visually stunning... but she is also smart, strong, witty, calculating, loyal and an exceptionally talented Zabrak Jedi who fights with two lightsaber tonfas, so she has twice the fighting power and uses

twice the skill of others. She adds a female presence that brings unique turns in the story and fights that you can't get from any of the male opponents in the game. Basically she kicks ass and takes names.

So what can you actually tell us at this stage about your character? Can you tell us anything about how you fit into the scheme of things.

Maris is on a mission to kill Darth Vader. She's a wicked fighter, so watching her take on an opponent is an extraordinary sight. She's not scared of anyone... neither her size, experience or gender keeps her from taking on a fight.

You meet her in the game at an

Can you expand upon the role you're playing, and how it ties into the storyline?

Juno Eclipse was a fantastic character to play. She's intelligent and strong and sassy - I loved the process! As for the storyline I wouldn't want to spoil anything for you! You'll have to play the game to find out!!

How was the experience of acting in a videogame in general - did you do your part separately, or as part of a group?

The process of recording a video game is rather different than say a movie. There's no set (obviously!?) or costumes but it is essentially the same process used for close-up recording. It's pretty much "acting from the waist up". You are using your whole body but really it's the facial movements that are the most important - these are what will essentially bring the characters to life in the game. I acted all my scenes with Sam Witwer, which was much easier than having to do it alone although there was still a bank of cameras between him and I for the most part!

Was there much motion capture involved?

They used motion capture for all of the facial likenesses. The process involves having lots of tiny reflective dots stuck to your face so that your features and movements can be 'mapped' seamlessly onto the character later in development. I have to give credit where credit is due to all the hardworking guys at LucasArts. The technology they have developed and are using to create this game, and bring it fully to life, astounds me. It really is going to be an amazing experience for gamers.

Have you seen much of *The Force Unleashed* itself? What do you think?

I've seen about as much as the rest of the fans! There's been lots of videos and clips on the *Star Wars* website and it really does look great. But I have yet to see the complete finished game. I still can't quite get over how realistic it all looks and how much Juno looks like me!?!? I can't wait to get my hands on it and start playing!



■ Two phallic objects of doom - which penis shaped object will survive?



ominous point in her life. She has had a very complicated history that challenged her and she could be considered good or evil depending on your perspective of those circumstances. She is fighting to survive during a very tumultuous time in the history of *Star Wars*. I find Maris' back story to be fascinating, and I'm confident *Star Wars* fans will love her and find her as interesting as I did.

How has the experience of working on a videogame been - have you enjoyed it? What are the pros and cons of working in this medium?

I've had a great time! I'm working with the best of the best, in a super cool

setting, expanding on a completely beloved story, getting great fan response, and playing a dynamic character... what's not to love?!

I guess the cons are that animation and all of the technology take so much longer to process than film - so you don't have the option of seeing playback on a take or watching what you shot immediately. It was months after doing the original voice work and the motion capture work, before I saw the first glimpses of the finished product.

Have you seen much of the finished product itself? What do you think so far?

I've seen what is posted on the official

website. The trailers, examples of game play and stuff.

And I was shown a bit more than that at the studios. I think it looks like SO MUCH FUN to play. The new technology really changes the entire experience. Everything is so much more real and interactive than I've ever seen in a game. The bar has been raised on absolutely every aspect of the game.



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

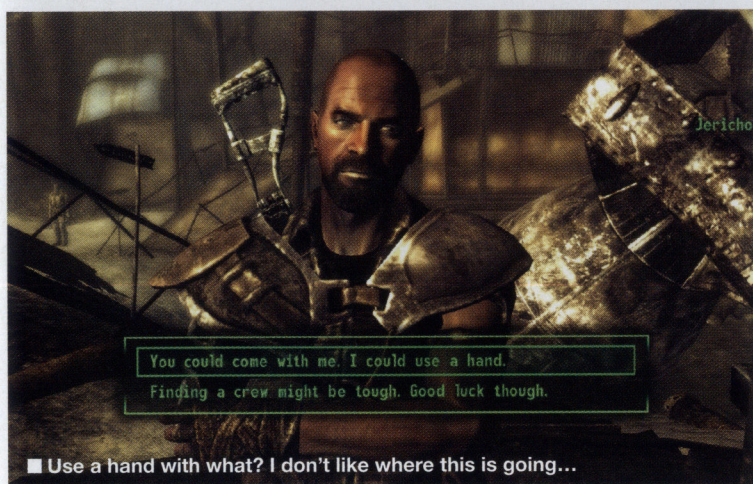
■ **GENRE:** RPG
■ **PLAYERS:** 1
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** RED ANT
■ **DEVELOPER:** BETHESDA
■ **WEB:** fallout.bethsoft.com

INFO BYTE

Your father in *Fallout 3* is voiced by the dulcet tones of none other than Liam Neeson. Thanks big guy – we loved you in *Love Actually*! And you almost made *The Phantom Menace* worth watching. Good job.



■ "I was told there would be cake and party pies. What gives?"



■ Use a hand with what? I don't like where this is going...



■ He's a leg man. A mutant leg man.

FALLOUT 3

War Never Changes

War never changes. We started out beating our brains out with unwieldy clubs and the like, before hacking at each other's limbs via the harsh reality of sharpened steel. Then, within the blink of an eye, nations were poised for the ultimate endgame – with nuclear arsenals that could potentially obliterate entire nations aimed directly at each other. Progress to the point of mass destruction; that is the end result of the base human instinct to push forward without a simple thought as to the consequences.

And, essentially, *Fallout 3* is that consequence manifested: a desolate, lifeless wasteland hammered into submission as a result of human progress.

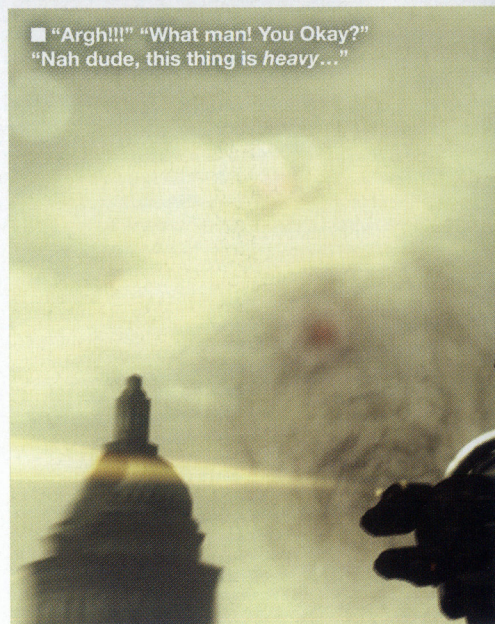
Stepping out of Vault 101 for the first time – where you'll spend the first precious hours of *Fallout 3* – is a perfect example of this. Whereas your first glimpse into the grand majestic vistas of *Oblivion* elicited a vibrant sense of wonder and infinite possibility; gazing upon this gaunt, war-torn, desolate setting symbolises the absence of hope. The message is clear: you will never prosper in this lifeless land – you can only hope to survive.

So those who feared *Fallout 3* would amount to little more than *Oblivion* with guns, you have nothing to fear. Bethesda's war-torn Washington DC has almost nothing in common with their previous environment. The art design is the biggest departure, and in many

ways is one of *Fallout*'s major strengths – peppered with images of 50s idealism that seem to take on a sinister irony in the midst of a post-apocalyptic war zone. In many ways it's the polar opposite of *Oblivion*'s vibrant colours, and picturesque environments.

The major upgrade in terms of environments is the detail. Technically speaking *Fallout 3* has twice the detail of the bewildering *Oblivion* world while being almost the same size, but more importantly Bethesda have done an incredible job of making *Fallout 3* far less empty – every nook and cranny seems to reward the player with a visual style that is far less cut and paste than you would expect from such an insanely huge space.

■ "Argh!!!" "What man! You Okay?"
"Nah dude, this thing is heavy..."





YOU CHOSE... WISELY/POORLY

And remarkably this broad scope extends itself to the variety of human choice. Whereas most games tend to ask the player to adapt to a preset rule system, *Fallout 3* is content to adapt to the player with a stats system that mimics, yet improves upon the levelling up that worked so well in *Oblivion*.

But what absolutely blew us away, was the opening sequence of *Fallout 3*. Believe it or not, you actually begin the game by crawling, with a game camera speckled in natal blood, out of your Mother's womb, and into one of the most well presented intro sequences we've seen in an RPG to date.

With your father cloaked in darkness, you choose your sex the moment you are born, before tweaking your facial features. Once you finish your father emerges from the darkness, with features analogous to the ones you just chose – it's just a brilliant example of a game fusing its narrative to the game flawlessly.

MORTAL COMBAT!

The combat is another area in which *Fallout* distinguishes itself from Bethesda's previous titles – instead of your bog-standard blunt instrument, you have a plethora of guns at your disposal. For the most part *Fallout 3* controls like an FPS, but the major addition is V.A.T.S. (Vault-

BOOM!



To give you an idea of what kind of decisions you'll have to make in *Fallout 3*, try this one on for size. In the city of Megaton there lies an undetonated Atomic bomb. You can either: leave it be, or detonate it from a safe distance destroying the city and all that inhabit it. Guess what we did. Yeah... we blew it up real good, and it looked abso-freakin' unbelievable. Best nuclear explosion ever... even topping the epic destruction of *Call of Duty 4*. Kablammo! Big time.

Tec Assisted Targeting System), a mechanic designed to sate all those hardcore *Fallout* fans mourning the death of the franchise's turn based combat. V.A.T.S. basically pauses combat, allowing players to isolate body parts of the enemy, and fire automatically according to a percentage chart.

If you activate V.A.T.S., for example, and the enemy is miles away, the chances of a head shot will be slim (say 20%) but you'll still have a decent shot (maybe 40%) at hitting the torso. It's an interesting addition that breaks up the monotony of endless firefights and adds some balance to the FPS/RPG see-saw that is *Fallout 3*.

And the weapons – those sweet, sweets tools of destruction, reigning death upon thine enemy – at this relatively early

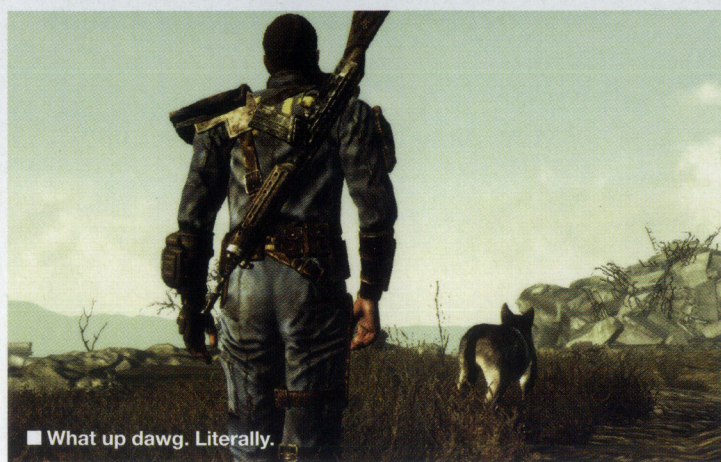
stage they're looking frickin' fantastic. The bizarrely named 'Fatman' jumped out at us like a leaping gazelle on red cordial. A grenade launcher of sorts, it works like a mini nuclear device leaving nothing but rubble and an ominous mushroom cloud in its wake. Make no mistake – this is not a toy to be trifled with.

The funny thing is, we still haven't scratched the surface. We're talking about a game here that features over 100+ hours of gameplay in single-player alone. A game that offers you multiple paths to different goals, a game that is rife with customisation, a game that almost demands multiple playthroughs. At this early stage, our money's on *Fallout 3* for RPG of the year.

▶ Mark Serrels



■ This guy has a car door for a shield – you've gotta admire that resourcefulness, right before he strangles you with your own intestines...



■ What up dawg. Literally.

BOTTOM LINE

- ▶ Jaw dropping environments
- ▶ Incredible weaponry
- ▶ Endless scope

OPS is...

going underground



FALLOUT 3 INTERVIEW

We got the chance to speak to Bethesda's Pete Hines about the upcoming *Fallout 3*...

OPS: So the game is *Fallout 3*, it's a sequel to the original *Fallout* games – what did leave out from the previous games, and what did you add to make it more of a next gen experience?

Pete Hines: I don't think there was anything we felt that we had to leave out, our approach was really no different than our approach with the *Elder Scrolls* stuff. We start all over – we're big believers in reinvention. Time and time again we saw some of our favourite franchises fade away, because the games wouldn't evolve, they kept making the same game over and over. We believe that we can't just rest on the last thing we did, so every time we start on a new game we sit down and ask – what's going to work? What's not going to work? What should we keep? What should we update? And what should we just tweak a little bit. Our feeling was – we didn't make the first two, but we're going to approach it as if we did. We wanted to retain the tone, the setting, the dialogue, moral choices and the dark humour. That's the kind of stuff we wanted in our game. But does it have to be isometric? No, not really – we can make the world come alive more in the first or third person. Does it have to turn based combat? Again, no – we feel we could retain the feel of the game without it.

OPS: Is there a balance between the RPG elements and the FPS aspects of the game?

PH: Well combat is an important

aspect of all RPGs, but our line was, first of all – that's not all the game is, because that's when you do cross the line, if all you have is combat. But we wanted to get the combat right in a game where if you have to pick up a gun – it had to be visceral and fun. Another focus was on adapting to the players strengths – if you melee a lot, then that should be one of your strengths, and likewise if you prefer to use guns. It needs to be balanced.

OPS: The game has a lot in common with *Oblivion*, but does a lot more in many ways, the major difference being the art design – what were the major differences in both games' development?

PH: Well, the games have different art directors and they clearly have their own visions of how each game should

look – but they were actually done almost in parallel. We were working on both simultaneously. They're similar, but they're really not that similar – because one is bright and fantastical, and the other is dark, desaturated and desolate. The challenge was how to make that environment not feel devoid of life, and make this world come alive.

OPS: You showed us one major choice you had to make in the game, and it got us thinking – how many paths can you take? How many end games are there in *Fallout 3*?

PH: The way the game ends is really a result of how you progress through the game, according to different points in the game and the decisions you make at those points. Megaton would be an example of one of them, what did you do – did you disarm the bomb, did you detonate it? Or maybe you just left it alone and it's still there. So the game is really your story, according to how you played it. It's all about the choices you make each step of the way.

Are you gonna talk your way out of situations, are you gonna use

violence? Are you a good guy or a bad guy? It's all up to you and the choices you make.

OPS: The *Fallout* brand isn't immediately recognizable for many PS3 owners – how do you attract a new audience? Do you use *Oblivion* as a starting point, try and appeal to fans of the previous game, or treat it as an entirely new franchise?

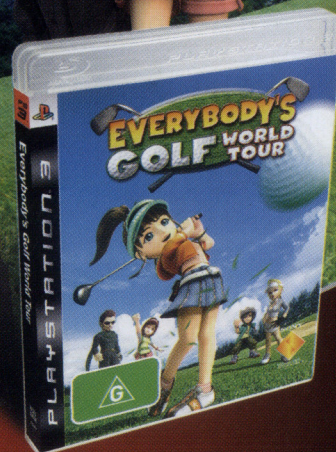
PH: Well, it's a very good question, and the answer is probably a combination of all of the above. It is the next *Fallout* game for fans, but if you don't know about *Fallout* then that doesn't really mean that much to you. In the same way, those that loved *Oblivion*, will probably be tracking this game, and checking for it, they hear about the post-nuclear game world and think – oh, that sounds pretty cool. So people are coming to the game from a lot of different paths, but essentially we want players who have played previous games to notice things, and to provide that added detail, but if you're walking into it fresh, it's still a great game in its own right.



FACE YOUR FRIENDS ON THE FAIRWAY!



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PLAYSTATION 3

EXCLUSIVE looks at the very best

PREVIEWS

PS3 PS2 PSP

- **GENRE:** SHOOTER
- **PLAYERS:** 1- TBA
- **RELEASE:** TBA 2008
- **DISTRIBUTOR:** UBISOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTREAL
- **WEB:** farcry.us.ubi.com



■ "Damn you, fire" (shoots wildly) "You killed my father! He was drunk and left the oven on, but that's not the point!"



FAR CRY 2

It's getting hot in here...

The original *Far Cry*, the stellar PC version in particular, was all about the foliage. It was greener than an Irishman's jockstrap, yet looked (and smelt, presumably) a whole lot more appealing. *Far Cry* was known mostly for its relatively revolutionary free roaming aspect – players had plenty of freedom to explore the lush island environment, and at the time that was a luxury few games in the genre espoused.

That luxury, that ability to traverse vast terrain as you see fit, is quite possibly the only feature that's transferred across into this ambitious sequel. It's more *Blood Diamond* than *Welcome to the Jungle*. In short – it's a 'far cry' from the original, and more like an entirely new IP for FPS

junkies to get their twitchy paws on.

Gone is the isolated Island experience, and the clunky feral abilities of the previous *Far Cry*, replacing it is a ponderously sized African vista, complete with a renewed focus on realism. You won't be powering through the jungle uppercutting dudes through the ceiling; you'll be scanning the desolate landscape, plotting your assault from a distance before carrying it out with a precision missing from most titles.

A free range, *Oblivion*-esque world allows you to approach groups of enemies, congregating in a series of rustic villages, from almost any angle you can imagine, running rampant with a variety of playstyles, all of which could be



■ When using a magnifying glass to kill ants goes wrong...

successful if executed well. *Far Cry 2* is a game that combines the scale of an RPG with the trigger-happy havoc of the FPS, and does so with flourish.

At the centre of it all is highly interactive map that allows you to scope out your targets from distance and plan accordingly. If you happen to spot a sniper for example, then his location will actively be added to your map, as will all his movements from that point onwards. This goes for pretty much everything in the expansive environment – anything you spot from mission locations, enemies,

gunstores, vehicles, structures, etc, are all being constantly added.

It all creates a feeling of interactivity missing from most games. *Far Cry 2*'s map isn't the kind you'll be used to – it isn't a case of 'press start and hop into a menu', it's held in the protagonist's hand like a weapon, and is constantly adapting to your environment, updating information to aid you in your multiple objectives.

So, as opposed to being taken out of the game, this map is actually a huge part of the gameplay itself, working as a

game mechanic that actually rewards you for using it, and hence rewards players for taking the time to scope out and plan attacks carefully. It adds a new dimension to gameplay missing from most shooters in the market.

And then there's fire – the frickin' fire. Fire that will spread instantaneously throughout a whole encampment and torch every last one of your enemies into a charred chicken if the wind is blowing correctly. Fire that can be used tactically to trap opponents in certain areas of the battlefield – or burn the absolute crap out of you if you get too adventurous. Fire that shoots viciously from tanks like a vibrant liquid nightmare if you put a bullet in the right place.

It looks incredible – and the fact that it has been so innately integrated into the

gaming experience simply pushes it to the next level.

And this theme of pushing things to the next level is something that extends throughout *Far Cry 2* – especially with regards to realism. Even at this relatively early stage in development, the game is packed full of the little touches, touches that slowly, gently, pull you closer into the game world itself.

The guns, for example, will start to jam if used too frequently – and if you continue to use this gun it will slowly deteriorate to the extent that it will eventually break and become completely and utterly unusable.

How about this – the vehicles that populate the African landscape can be driven... get beaten up... then consequently fixed by your own good self, by simple popping the hood and getting your hands dirty with a wrench!

We find it quite refreshing that a game that seems so focused on making everything large hasn't forgotten about the small things, the touches that really draw you in.

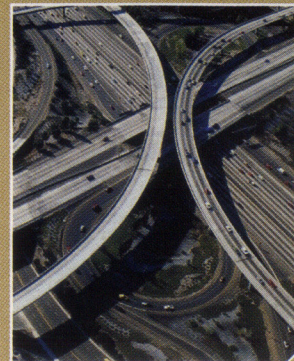
But there are issues. The PS3 version of the game, from a visual standpoint, is currently lagging behind the PC version at this stage in development, and it seems that some of the enemy AI has taken a backseat to the stunning reactive world that Ubisoft have tried to create. On more than a few occasions we saw our targets partaking in some slightly random behaviour – mainly running head on into our bullets. It's definitely an area in need of some tweekage.

But we admire the ambition – this is an attempt to create a truly unique experience within a traditional FPS framework, and we can't wait to see if Ubisoft can pull it off.

Consider our interest thoroughly piqued. **Mark Serrels**

DESERTED

The world of *Far Cry 2* is ridiculously huge, easily the largest FPS we've seen to date. One innovative way to navigate this enormous landscape is to use the rivers that snake throughout. By heading to the river players can hop in a boat and paddle quickly downstream, via a system that the developers are calling the 'highways' of *Far Cry 2*. The drawback? You're completely vulnerable to enemy fire whilst travelling...

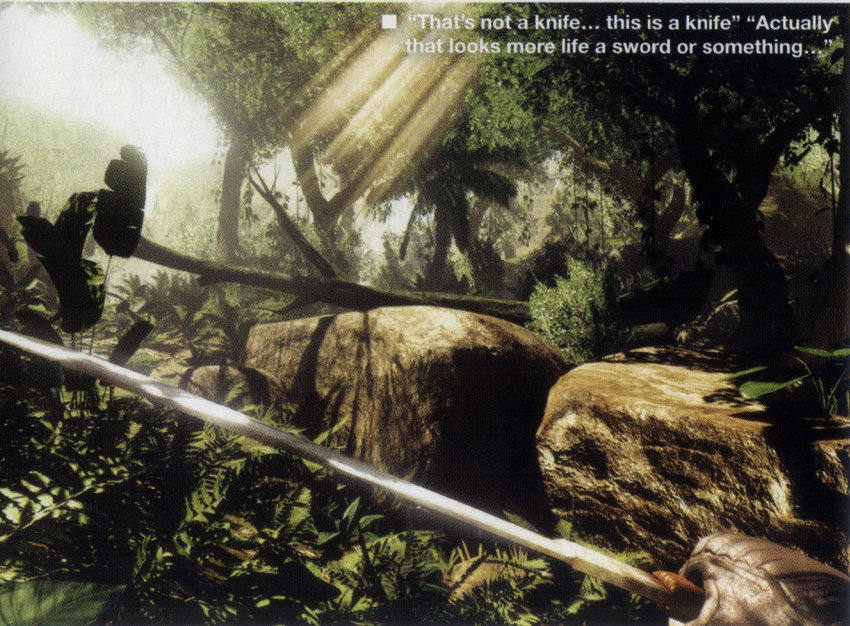


“...combines the scale of an RPG with the trigger happy havok of the FPS...”

Bazooka that verucal



■ “That’s not a knife... this is a knife” “Actually that looks more like a sword or something...”



INFO BYTE

Players can actually choose to play as one of nine different characters in the game – and the eight you don't choose will all still play their parts in *Far Cry 2*'s non linear storyline.

BOTTOM LINE

- 👤 Huge open world
- 👁️ The little things...
- 👹 Stupid enemies

OPS is...

On fire!



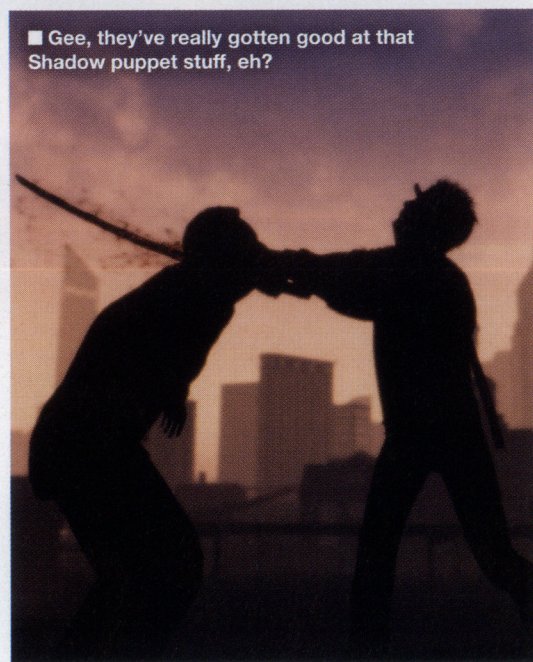
PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **PLAYERS:** 1 - 16 (TBC)
■ **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** THQ
■ **DEVELOPER:** VOLITION
■ **WEB:** www.saintsrow2.com

■ "Yeah, so. I tattoo my own face, and have nude paintings of my Grandma hanging on my wall – you gotta problem with that?!"



■ Gee, they've really gotten good at that Shadow puppet stuff, eh?



SAINTS ROW 2

When the Saints go marching in...

Waking up in an asylum with a sex change has gotta hurt! Even worse waking up 15 years older trying to work out if you want your genitals re-attached after they've been blown off by a boat bomb due to the climactic conclusion of *Saints Row*.

That's some messed up shit right there, and then you actually start playing the game! While you don't have to go through the whole birthing experience like in *Fallout 3*, you will have to break free of your cage in order to take on Stilwater.

And then there's that *other* issue hanging over the head of the player – do you really want another open world gang related videogame on your shelf so soon after purchasing the last one, as so many

people did. It takes a massive pair of cajones to release in the same year as the universally acclaimed *GTA IV*, and mimicking is not an option. Obviously you're not an European dirty on all things Americana. Instead you'll be creating a thug in order to take on the mean streets.

FACE TO FACE

In a game about respect, face is all important, you'll get to choose yours based on either a 'series of presets', meaning you pick sex, age, race and build, or you can devote some serious time to how you want to look, in which case you can look like just about anyone. Through a system of 'sliders' you can set tone of skin colour, size of nose, muscular

definition, height, weight throw on a Mohawk, bling or mess with your eyelids. You can be Mexican, African American, Caucasian or create a blend like Eurasian or Mexafricana. You can even set the facial expression that you'll carry around the game, 'Inebriated' anyone? From there it's all down to style.

How you carry yourself, your swagger, is down to you and will heavily project the type of character you're playing as, something to consider when dragging your pimply faced, tiptoeing blood nut into the co-op and multiplayer modes. Even your fight style screams loads – Brazilian capawara is amongst the various martial arts unlockable as you progress along with various finishing moves.

A Taunts and Praise system is in use to make friends and incite some pretty messed up blood shed. There's nothing more likely to land a fist in your face or your intimates than teabagging a stranger or partaking in the more inventive 'ride the donkey' taunt. You might want to take into consideration when it's best to use these towards NPCs, because pulling this out early in the game when all you have is a knife on hand will result in death. However, when you're stocked with a fully automatic AS14 Hammer shotgun, Satchel Charges and an Annihilator, ready for your manually loaded projectiles, dangle away.

On the other side you can show respect to those around you by pulling a number of gestures which, while not



as much fun, will encourage a blissful existence for the time being. Throw in a 'thumbs up' after witnessing a sweet slaughter or 'bow' to an accommodating pal and Stilwater will seem like a walk in the park.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T

Respect being the currency of the game you won't get very far without demanding it. Struts and taunts will only get you so far before you have to dig into the grit of the world.

With the game tracking your every move, respect is racked up by getting into and thoroughly exploring new areas, taking on enemy gang members in gunfights and of course the all-important vehicle exploits – jumps, stunts, chases and the likes.

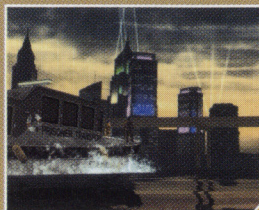
While you can grab a race just about anywhere in Stilwater, powersliding around in various vehicles or taking out a building with a plane, which is probably a tad more controversial than using human shields but will go unnoticed, will provided added opportunities.

While much of your kudos will come from having loose morals and doing dodgy deals on the street, you can earn a slightly more ethical living with roles like acting as a bodyguard for celebrities.

Once that gets boring, you can step into the ring and go to blows with hardened criminals, mixing up your brawl styles and snapping some bones. Maybe



DEEP IN THE WATER



Stilwater is based on the Midwest cities of Detroit and Chicago. While both are perceived to have high crime rates due to gang and drug culture, with Detroit once labelled the 'Murder capital of the world', the real crime rates are much lower than the national, state and metro averages. However, there have been various investigations into the their Police departments over the use of force and civil rights violations.

try pulling a swiftie on the insurance people by playing in traffic. While introduced in the original *Saints Row*, the new Adrenaline mode will ensure that the pedestrian-on-car collisions will be a smashing success – team up in co-op and you'll be swimming in combos and cash.

If all else fails, forget their feelings and shoot them in the groin, run them over with a car or beat someone senseless with a mailbox to get noticed.

WHERE'S THE ROW

Having been delayed for a second time, there are obviously some changes, tweaks and modifications being done to the game in order to make sure it tickles more than a few people's soft spots.

While we see fun ahead streaking through the streets of Stilwater there are

still some balancing issues and earlier mentioned vehicle handling that we hope gets addressed.

Not previously released on a Sony console, the *Saints Row* series will be breaking into a new world but it comes chock full of ammo, guts and (hopefully) glory. Make no mistake – Volition is out for blood. **Vanessa Morgan**

BOTTOM LINE

- Customisation
- Reward system
- Handling...

OPS is...

Hunting for ammo



"There's nothing more likely to land a fist in your face or your intimates than teabagging a stranger"



INFO BYTE

A Collector's Edition has been announced containing embossed metal collector's tin, exclusive poster, exclusive art book, metal money clip, and a bullet-shaped USB drive. Will it make it to OZ?

■ Name: Geoff. Hobbies: shooting people in the face.

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** STRATEGY
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-8
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** UBISOFT
■ **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT SHANGHAI
■ **WEB:** endwargame.us.ubi.com



■ In the future – all games are prefaced by 'Tom Clancy', because he is the supreme ruler of the entire world...



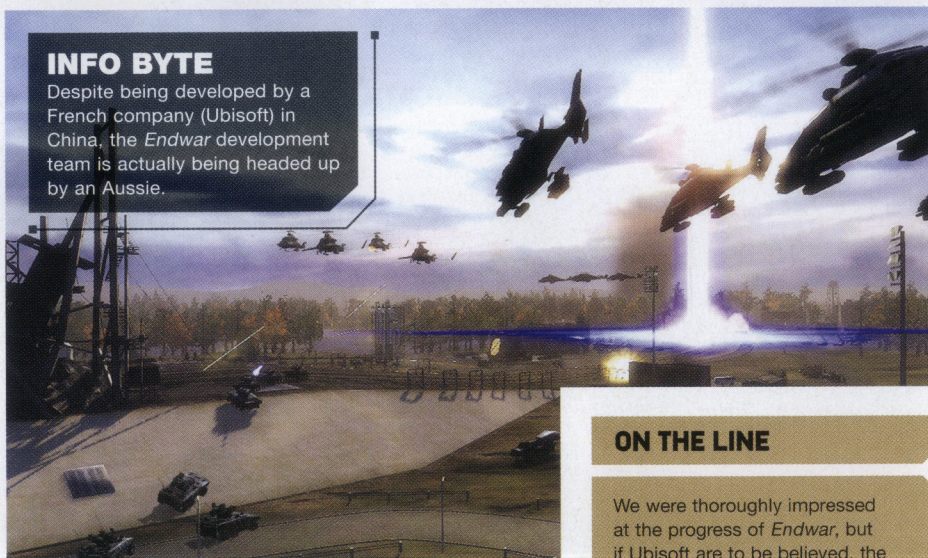
■ "Get to the Cho-" (BOOM) "I think I done blew up our ride home..."



■ This is how God unleashes pestilence and plagues.

INFO BYTE

Despite being developed by a French company (Ubisoft) in China, the *Endwar* development team is actually being headed up by an Aussie.



ON THE LINE

We were thoroughly impressed at the progress of *Endwar*, but if Ubisoft are to be believed, the best is yet to come – mainly with regards to the online section. Titled the theatre of war, the online section of *Endwar* is said to be a 24 hour game with a constantly evolving battlefield. So basically, if you turn off the console at night, by the time you continue playing in the morning the rest of the game world will have progressed without you. We can't wait to see how it all works.



All night long baby!

BOTTOM LINE

Voice controls
Slick presentation
Graphics?

OPS is...
In the war room



ENDWAR

The end is nigh

Let's break OPS preview conventions for a change and get a little personal. Your humble reviewer here does not actually hail from Australia – in actual fact, I just so happen to be Scottish, and hence sport the broadest Scottish accent this side of Groundskeeper Willie. When I speak blank stares and bemused expressions are not uncommon, my own wife tends to have difficulties – comparisons to Brad Pitt's character in *Snatch* are frequent.

Anyway, why the life story? Well, the point here is that when I heard that *Endwar* was going to be controllable via voice recognition software, my black Scottish heart sank into the doldrums – because there would be absolutely no way my Scottish brogue would be recognisable. In short, I was cynical.

But thankfully... I was completely and utterly wrong.

With nary a hitch, shouting and screaming orders on the fly would result in the troops doing precisely what was asked of them. *Endwar*'s voice control

turned out to be just as functional as any other system we've seen in a strategy game, responding just as well to any accent thrown at it.

How it works is this – voice control requires the player to speak using brief preset commands, all of which are easily memorised, and are constantly prompted on the screen regardless. They are generally broken up into Unit/Command/Objective, for example you could say "Unit 2/attack/Hostile 3" and it will be done.

And this works for a broad range of different strategic movements – quite literally players will only have to press one button (to activate the mic) throughout the whole game, making the control issues that have plagued strategy games on console since the beginning of time.

We were also impressed by a couple of neat additions to the game's vocabulary – after being encouraged by Ubi we asked 'Unit 2' to 'f*ck up' 'hostile 3' – and lo and behold they did just that. This instruction is absent from the instruction menus for obvious reasons, but it whets

our appetite for some other expletives we might direct to our sworn enemies.

"Pleasantly surprised" is the phrase that seemed to perfectly summed up our experience of *Endwar*. We came in expecting the voice controls to be a bit of a gimmick, and left convinced of its merits in a big way.

For years consoles have struggled to match the more flexible mouse and keyboard set up, but *Endwar* essentially negates the need for control at all with an intuitive system that renders all that have come before mute.

So yeah, we were kinda impressed by *Endwar*. It handled a brutish Scottish accent with flying colours, and managed to play quite well in the process.

Now that we've been thoroughly convinced of the voice recognition, we're keen to get into the real meat of the game and test out the game mechanics themselves. If the team can pull this off with the same success as they did voice recognition, then we could have a winner on our hands. **Mark Serrels**

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

INFO BYTE

Like every single Clancy game ever made, *Hawx* is set in the very near future...

■ Can we get through these captions without a *Top Gun* reference? Highly doubtful...

■ You go, big shootey man!

■ "Alpha to Delta, Great ball of fire heading your way, over" "Delta to Alpha, you're breaking up, yes, I know, Great Balls of fire is a great song, I played it at my wedding..." (STATIC)

■ **GENRE:** FLIGHT
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-TBA
■ **RELEASE:** TBA 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** UBISOFT
■ **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT ROMANIA
■ **WEB:** www.hawxgame.com

PLANE SAILING

All you aviator geeks out there – prepare to be aroused. *Hawx* is packing a reported 50 fighter jets into its steel innards including (deep breath): the F-16C, the F-22 Raptor, the MiG-29, the Sukhoi Su-35, and a Eurofighter Typhoon. Although this vast range of air weaponry will fly straight over the head of your average joe, enthusiasts will be soiling their pants with glee.



BOTTOM LINE

Smooth as buggery
Awesome detail
Too fiddly?

OPS is...
Flying high



TOM CLANCY'S HAWX

Fight and flight...

When cornered into physical confrontation, Psychologists across the globe agree – there are two reactions a human being will make: they'll either run like buggery, or strengthen their resolve for inevitable fisticuffs. Professionals call it the 'fight or flight' instinct...

In *Hawx*, however, both these instincts amount to the same thing – fireworks.

Because *Hawx* is a game that takes all your wildest *Top Gun* fantasies, removes the mild porno eroticism, and leaves behind an adrenaline fuelled barn stormer of a game that looks set to redefine almost every aspect of what has become a derelict, stagnant genre. In short, *Hawx* AMRAAMs a Sidewinder up the arse of any flight sim that had the audacity to come before it.

Part of the reason is the high production values – *Hawx* might not run at exactly 60 frames per second, but it's close as dammit, resulting in a gameplay experience that slams home the feeling of flying at hernia inducing speeds.

And the detailed city-scapes that, from a distance, look like Google Earth times a million, make flying over the various environments an absolute joy. In our demo we got the 'oppor-chancity' to have a gander at a level set in Rio de Janeiro and the level of detail on display was nothing short of staggering. Flying over the statue of Christ the Redeemer (highway to the 'manger' zone) we swooped in between the skyscrapers, pulling out into a radical incline to shoot down our enemies without prejudice. Solid.

Which is a word that could also be used to describe the game mechanics on display. Flipping between different modes allows you to tailor your *Hawx* experience, helping you outwit your enemies. Another mode zooms out into a radically different 3rd person view, from which you can see the fighter on your tail, making it easier to perform those fancy evasive manoeuvres you've no doubt seen on TV.

It's the kind of perfectly judged design decision that seems set to elevate *Hawx* above the also rans. It's tragic the way flight sims have been mired in mediocrity, and it's about time that someone pulled the finger out and got busy with something genuinely evolutionary. It's a task that those clever chaps at Ubisoft Romania have taken to heart – we can't wait to get our claws on *Hawx*. **Mark Serrels**

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** RACING
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-16 (ONLINE)
■ **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** FUNTASTIC
■ **DEVELOPER:** BLACK ROCK STUDIO
■ **WEB:** www.disney.co.uk



■ That's not flying – that's falling with style...

PURE

Fun – pure and simple...

In the wide, varied, and belligerent realm of videogames – what does it mean to be pure? Does it refer to the purity of simplistic game design, or the purity of basic fun? Perhaps it alludes to the simple pleasures of a non violent experience such as the family friendly values espoused by Nintendo.

Thankfully, in the case of *Pure*, it refers to a 'pure' dose of balls to the wall, peel your arse cheeks from the seat, speed. This is a game that combines the visceral thrills of *Motorstorm* with the outright trickery of *SSX* to create a

brilliantly accessible racer that occupies a comfortable niche few have attempted to cater to.

BOOST JUICE

As evidenced from the screenshots littered across both these pages, *Pure* is a game based solely on ATVs. Tricks and various other tomfoolery is the name of the game here. Much like *SSX*, landing awesome/radical/tubular tricks will result in your boost bar increasing – which can be used for either 'boosting' (surprise, surprise) or as a gateway to performing

more spectacular tricks.

It's an interesting balance, refraining from using your boost early on in the race will benefit you later, as it allows you to perform more spectacular tricks, which in turn grants you more juice exponentially. It's a game mechanic that showcases Black Rock Studio's entire design ethic with regards to *Pure*: fun over realism, and playability over pedantics.

BALANCING ACT

This is a balance that suits us just fine – the game is an out and out humdinger,



and even at this early stage *Pure* sets its stock as a game to be played with absolute glee. The tricks are simple enough to pull off, raising some question as to the game's depth, but watching the ATV's hurtle into a ponderous jump is an experience that may cause heart palpitations. The pumping soundtrack fades out, the wind seems to whoosh out through the speakers, and you're left with an overwhelming feeling of 'Oh-my-sweet-Jesus-how-the-hell-am-I-going-to-land-this-bloody-trick'.

It creates for gamers a real suspended

moment in time, a chance to gander at the incredible draw distance, and an opportunity to bust out some of the more insane tricks on offer.

And speaking of tricks, *Pure* has an insane amount on offer – upwards of 80 per rider, not including the special tricks unique to each character. Every single last one of these tricks is animated brilliantly, the movements of the riders are pitch perfect to the extent that even their shirts flap in the wind when your ATV reaches breakneck speeds. It all adds to the intensity of the *Pure* experience.

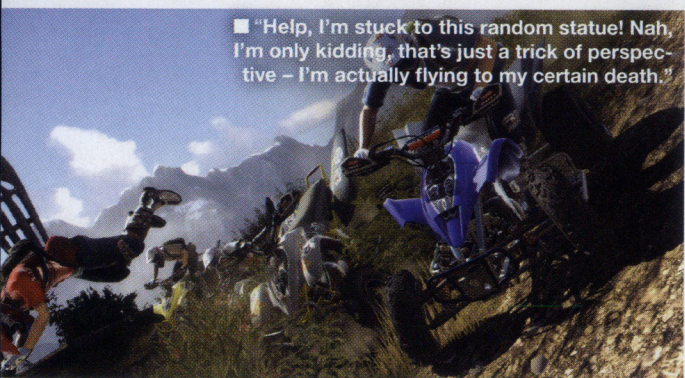
WELCOME TO PURE...



Despite playing very much like its own game, *Pure* has plenty in common with the superlative *Motorstorm* – mainly all the awesome aspects. In particular *Pure* has some incredible track designs that offer multiple optional routes and shortcuts. In addition, during some longer races, certain tracks will be integrated into other tracks for a huge race bonanza of awesome-sauce!



■ Doesn't anyone sit on ATVs anymore? Geez...



■ "Help, I'm stuck to this random statue! Nah, I'm only kidding, that's just a trick of perspective – I'm actually flying to my certain death."



■ A backpack. A frickin' backpack? What, did Mummy make you a pack lunch?



the intuitive controls – but most likely it's a combination of all of the above. In short – the game works as it should, which bodes well for the finished product.

THE GARAGE

And we haven't even mentioned the Garage yet – the section of the game that will appeal to the hardcore, and most likely be a source of endless replayability for those who enjoy taking the time to endlessly tweak their machine.

And even this aspect of the game is a visual feast of sorts, not in terms of sheer polygon pushage, but in the way you can watch as your ATV constructs itself from the absolute bare bones to the finished article. Beginning with the absolute bare bones, each adjustment to the vehicle results in something being added until you have the race-ready finished product.

It's a brilliantly presented section of the game that does well to visualise a game mechanic that's usually as dry as a badger's arse. The fact that you can watch your entire ATV being constructed from absolute ground zero makes it all the more compulsive and not to mention satisfying when you finally get that sucker out on the track.

So yeah, we were pretty impressed to say the least – especially considering the fact there are two entire game modes yet to be unveiled at this stage. The exact details regarding the freestyle mode interest us most, as we've been told there's a couple of tricks left up *Pure*'s sleeve with regards to this mode.

Ooh, mysterious! **Mark Serrels**

“...underpinning the whole package is a base engine that allows players to feel every turn, soar into each titanic leap, and cringe at every landing...”

THE CRUNCH

Let's do a little number crunching.

Pure has three different game modes: Race, Sprint, and Freestyle. Race is exactly what it says on the tin, sprint is a super duper short burst of speedy goodness, and Freestyle is a gametype based on high scores alone.

There are seven separate riders available, each with an afore-mentioned 80 bustable tricks, seven different real world locations, laden with numerous races, featuring plenty of alternate routes. The game runs at an already smooth 30 frames per second and online multiplayer allows up to 16 players to compete online. Rad.

That's a whole lot of numbers, which adds up to good times – but behind the raw number crunching, underpinning the whole package is a base engine that allows players to feel every turn, soar into each titanic leap, and cringe at every landing. It could be a result of the impressive physics, the stellar visuals, or



BOTTOM LINE

- Brilliantly balanced
- Solid visuals
- Possibly shallow?

OPS is...

Tricky!



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **PLAYERS:** 1
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA
■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
■ **WEB:** www.sega.com



■ "We've been crapped on for the LAST time" said the angry toilet



■ To make omelettes, you've got to crack some eggs, apparently



SONIC UNLEASHED

The hedgehog checks out of rehab!

Sonic is the Britney Spears of gamedom. An attractive icon loved by many, his slouching form over recent years has seen him spiral down into a mass of broken spines. Fuelled by periods of heavy drug and alcohol abuse, and a slutty image that probably hasn't... Wait. Sorry. The metaphor ended a while back, didn't it?

Right. Sonic.

Sega recently invited OPS over to Japan to prove just how serious Sonic is about repimping his image. After a barrage of mediocre cash grabs, Sega's blue ball of biff is set to clean himself up and get back to the quality of yesteryear in *Sonic Unleashed*. For one, Sonic Team are back with something to prove and

have entrusted the project to bright young phenom Yoshihisa Hashimoto. Hashimoto is no stranger to Sonic, having worked on many of the games in the past. The big difference he's out to recapture the appeal of the original *Sonic* games from Sega's old-school systems. In other words, he's out to make it FUN.

While the game is still sushi raw overall, we were shown a handful of levels that were getting close to completion. The first thing that jumped out at us was the ree-diculous speed Sonic was moving at – even faster than a juiced up Marion Jones! Hashimoto commented that to nail the speed of the game he drew a lot of inspiration from eye-bleeding racing games such as the

Burnout series and Nintendo's *F-Zero*, though it's clear *Sonic Unleashed* is out to make those racers look like L-platers. From what we saw, Sonic will be able to hit ludicrous speeds that cause the whole screen to blur in a similar fashion to the drag racing bits of the original *Need for Speed Underground*. Combined with the series' rainbow colours, this will – without doubt – be the finest epileptic trigger devised by man.

This was illustrated smartly by the game's opening cinematic. Dr Eggman/ Robotnick/whatever the hell his name is, is hovering in Earth's atmosphere with a bazillion space cruisers backing him up. Despite the firepower, Sonic lands on his mother ship and proceeds to rip

ten shades of crap out of his robotic minions before cornering Dr Eggman for a final showdown. Somewhere in there Sonic pulls out the Chaos Emeralds and turns into Super Sonic right as Eggman pulls his trap and snares Sonic. In all the confusion, the Chaos Emeralds, that would fetch a heavy amount on ebay, fall towards Earth. The energy in this opening was through the roof – more like *Star Wars* than anything – but it did a great job of setting up the game.

Called *Sonic World Adventure* in Japan, it'll see Sonic embark on a global Contiki tour to kick spine throughout a selection of postcard backdrops as he tries to regather the Chaos Emeralds. For instance we saw a New York level packed



with wide burning highways, a Great Wall of China track that saw Sonic sprint down the gob of a dragon (true that), an African locale devoid of any humanitarian crisis, and a snobby Mykonos haven with pebbly roads and little coffee shops. Sega told us there'd be nine locations in total, with several levels within each.

Apart from collecting more gold than Mr. T, during our demo Sonic had to overcome the usual pinball-esque obstacles we've grown accustomed to over the years. Dodging spindly robots and using his homing attack to dispatch mechanical menaces all featured. Fortunately apart from these trademark skids, bounces, and bops, *Sonic Unleashed* is set to feature a bunch of new stuff. For one, the game often moved between a side-on view of the action reminiscent of the original console games for more platform intensive sections, and a rear view for moments that played out like a racer. During these latter sections Sonic also showed off his new drift skills. Drawing influence from games such as *Sega Rally* and *Daytona USA*, at the press of a button the fit little bugger can now breezily

WHO'S THE BOSS?



Part of the reason the old-school *Sonic* games were several grades of awesome was because players got to trollop the mump-faced Dr Eggman at the end of each level. To harken back to that, *Sonic Unleashed* will also feature some huge end-of-level bosses to pound. We got to see one during our demonstration. Rather than a stagnant battle, Sonic was speeding along while a huge mechanical spider dangled in front of him and threw more hell at him than a pissed off housewife. Sonic had to dodge all the debris while going in for some critical attacks. If it was any indication of the final product, expect a gallery of massive foes to trounce when the game comes out later this year.

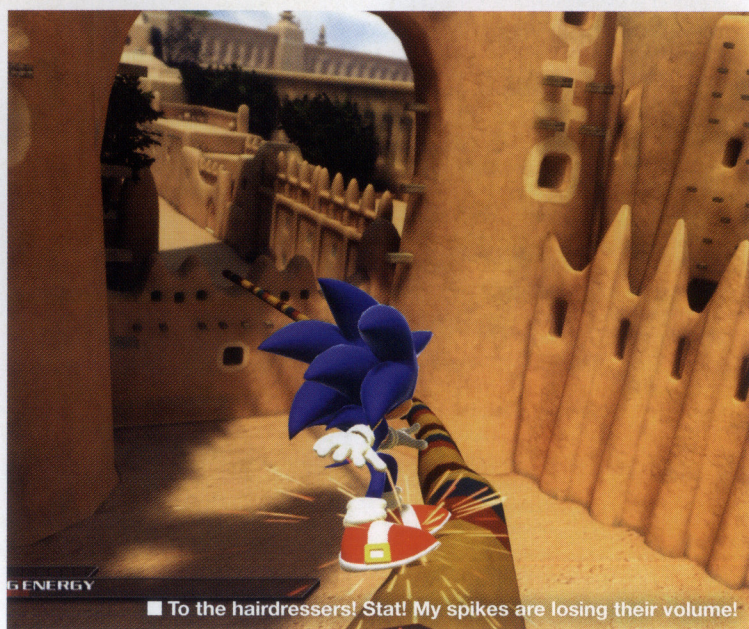
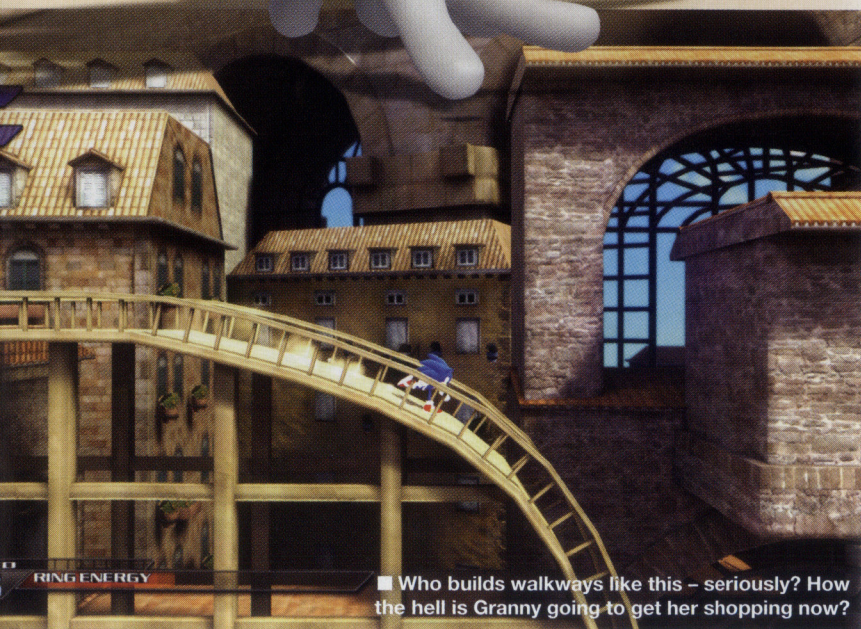
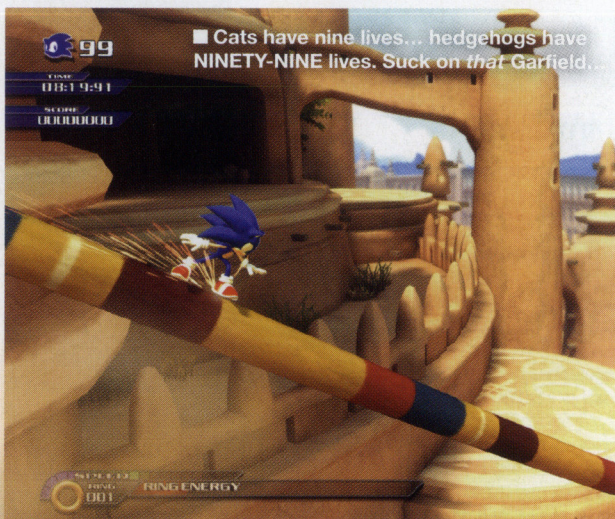
drift around hairpins without a notable reduction in speed. It looked, well, sweet.

The only point of concern was that those bloody hub levels where you've got to potter about and talk to people are back. What the? We interrogated Hashimoto on it and he assured us they were there merely to break up the intensity of the game and wouldn't be as utterly offensive as they were in *Sonic the Hedgehog*.




Hashimoto was also quite chuffed

about *Sonic Unleashed*'s new coat of paint. When you start stroking your beard about it, the technology behind the *Sonic* games since *Sonic Adventure* has been quite the slick little biscuit. *Sonic Unleashed* is set to build on that with some fancy new lighting effects that make Sonic and his levels really spring out of the screen. Expect the end product to look good enough to lick.

After all that, the most intriguing element of *Sonic Unleashed* is the mysterious night-time mode of play that will, apparently, be quite the poke to the eye compared to the standard *Sonic* formulae. While we don't actually know anything concrete about these levels, Hashimoto let it slip they'll feature heavily in the game and will tie into the game's title. We'll have to wait and see if whatever is behind Sega's curtain is worth the hype. **James Ellis**



BOTTOM LINE

-  Speedy
-  Lame buddies absent
-  Stupid 'talking' sections

OPS is...
Very confident



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** RPG
■ **PLAYERS:** 1
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA
■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
■ **WEB:** www.sega.com



■ "Argh! Who put Coldplay on my iPod! It burns!"

■ "So what do you think of my sideburns? Impressive eh?" "I've seen better..."

■ "I knew I shouldn't have eaten that nuclear bomb sandwich – but it looked so delicious!"



■ "I don't know how to tell you this but... your hat is way too small for your head..."



VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

Like chess, but with girls in mini-skirts

If you've ever wanted to – aghast – start using your brain while embroiled in a ten-finger joystick war, SEGA might have something in the pot for you. *Valkyria Chronicles* is a tactical RPG born from a head-on collision between Japanese manga culture and, the burn's favourite, chess. The absolute nuts and bollocks of it see you take part in a turn-based battlefield as you shuffle your platoon about in a bid to achieve positional domination. Part of your 'go', however, sees you zoom down into the game world to take control of whatever unit is up at the plate and blow the fudge out of nearby hostiles in real time.

Why the bullet clanging in the first place? Like all Japanese RPGs, *Valkyria Chronicles* is big on storytelling. The game is set in a sort of faux version of 1930's Europe while the two big dogs of the day, the evil Empire and the Atlantic Federation, bark it out with each other. As it stands, the bookies favour the Empire, which is bad news for Gallia, a previously neutral country sandwiched between the two. Things go from pretty frikkin' disastrous for Gallia, to "let's go buy a headstone" when the Empire sides up with the mystical Valkyries, an ancient race of god-like beings who make 50 Cent look a viable option for a babysitter. The only way for Gallia to survive without becoming a footnote in history is for its pleb-like citizens – yes, even its young ladeez – to take up the war baton. Enter spearhead Welkin Gunther. Yes, his name suggest that he is, in fact, a proverbial knob, but he also leads your crew of ballsy fighters throughout each battle and he's got to score some props for that.

Apart from its hybrid of play styles, *Valkyria Chronicles* has also sought originality by wearing the only watercolour dress to the party. Using the Canvas Engine, SEGA have been able to whip up some sugary scenery reminiscent of the PS2 RPG *Dark Chronicles*. As can be seen, it has a soft cartoonish appeal we don't get to lay our peepers on often.

That's all good and great, but what looks sweet about *Valkyria Chronicles* is the depth you can bring to the bloodied map. Your platoon can be fully customised with 50 characters, each possessing different strengths and weaknesses, available to join your mob. Snipers, heavy weapon thugs who carry around massive Lancer rocket launchers, and even old war veterans are all here as you try to obliterate the other mob. Naturally all these soldiers won't be available from the get-go, with many needing to be liberated as you progress along on your beard-stroking rampage.

While it might not be for everyone, *Valkyria Chronicles* is shaping up to be something refreshingly different.

— James Ellis

BOTTOM LINE

Think while shooting stuff.
Vibrant look. We like it.
Only one player? Wha-wha-

OPS is...

Hoping for the best



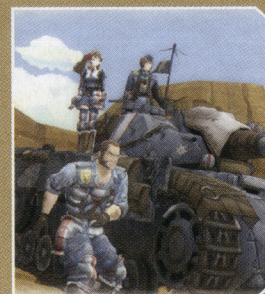
INFO BYTE

This baby is already out in Japan. The blokes in SEGA are in the process of making sure the version released in the West is up to scratch.



TANK-TAS-TIC

What platoon would be complete without its own set of angry tanks? In addition to your foot soldiers, *Valkyria Chronicles* also lets you take tanks out to play during the game's many missions. You'll have to use them sparingly, though, as they cost more Command Points, the currency that dictates how many moves you can make on your turn. Also, while they smack most opposition over the fence, Lancer rocket launchers can take them out if they get a clear shot of their vulnerable rear. "Vulnerable rear", why does that sound so funny?



HILARY SWANK SNOWBOARDING

Shaun White may look like Hilary Swank, but he sure as hell doesn't Snowboard like her. Simply put, he is an absolute phenomenon, winning every event he enters. He's been sponsored since he was bloody nine years old and has already made the cover of Rolling Stone. Most likely he'll be the next Extreme Sports star your Grandma could pick out from a line-up. Yep, he's just that good.



INFO BYTE

Shaun White has been called the flying tomato, as a result of his flowing, ginger mane...



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

- **GENRE:** SPORTS
- **PLAYERS:** 1- TBA
- **RELEASE:** TBA 2008
- **DISTRIBUTOR:** UBISOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTREAL
- **WEB:** www.ubi.com



SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

It's 'snow' joke (sorry...)

Extreme Sports games, it seems, always come attached to a star few have heard of outside its own niche market. It's a symbiotic relationship of sorts – the game gets the credibility that comes by hitching its cart to a hardcore hero, and the hero in question gets branded by association.

And following in the hallowed footsteps of your Tony Hawks (and to a lesser extent your Matt Hoffmans and your Kelly Slaters) comes Shaun White, the Snowboarding wunderkind with a twisted sense of humour and a shock of long red hair that sorta makes him look like Hilary Swank.

But this isn't *Million Dollar Baby*, and there'll be no *P.S. I Love You*s where we're going, it's all about clambering to the top of gargantuan mountain peaks,

and hurtling down at the speed of a spider monkey on some serious crack.

So far so meh, you might say – snowboarding games are usually as much fun as pouring hydrochloric acid down your crotch, but this title has more than a few tricks up its sleeve that might just elevate this title to the graces of EA's almighty *SKATE*.

Firstly, the game utilises the Scimitar engine, which was responsible for a small production by the name of *Assassin's Creed* – and whether you loved or hated *AC* there can be little doubt she was a bit of a looker. From what we've seen of *Shaun White Snowboarding*, this game looks set to follow suit.

But above and beyond visual flourish, balancing controls and general feel are of paramount importance in games of this

ilk – thankfully *Shaun White* is pitched comfortably between *Tony Hawk's* button mashing, and *SKATE's* analogue flickin'. It's a compromise that suits the game well – the right analogue stick is used for manuals and subtle balance, whilst an ollie is performed via a button press.

This may seem like a step backwards from *SKATE's* flick it revolution, but this is a Snowboarding game, and as such it has to play differently, or risk redundancy. But what *Shaun White* does have in common with EA's masterpiece is a physics driven effort, with none of the anti grav nonsense of *Tony Hawk's*. Realism is a focus – but not at the expense of fun.

Because with five completely open mountains to explore, *Shaun White Snowboarding* promises to be the most expansive boarding sim yet. After the

success of *SKATE* we've been rekindled to the idea that extreme sports can be a viable genre in videogames once more. Hopefully *Shaun White Snowboarding* can follow in the snow prints of these forebears and give us a sim worth playing. **Mark Serrels**

BOTTOM LINE

- Five Open Mountains
- Realistic Physics
- No 'flick it' controls?

OPS is...
Tubular



■ Hellboy: he's on fire. Literally



GIVE

Whilst chillin' out in Brisbane at Krome Studios, we were lucky enough to get a hands on and some face time with a few of the developers to get the low down on *Hellboy: The Science of Evil*. We had a chat with lead artist Stuart McKenzie as he took us through the creative process. His enthusiasm for the title was quite infectious. He mentioned that whilst being extremely mindful and respectful of Mignola's character, Hellboy director Guillermo encouraged Krome to take it in new directions. What you get is a mesh of the original comic, voiced by the movie character, scored by the guys that did the animated *Hellboy*, with character designs tweaked by Krome – and it all looks a treat. McKenzie recounted to us his nervousness

about meeting with Guillermo to show the latest batch of conceptual art, only to be astounded when he went off his rockers, refusing to change even a single detail or simply write constructive criticism on the pages, animatedly exclaiming what a great idea the whole thing was, lamenting the fact they didn't come up with such great ideas in the first place?

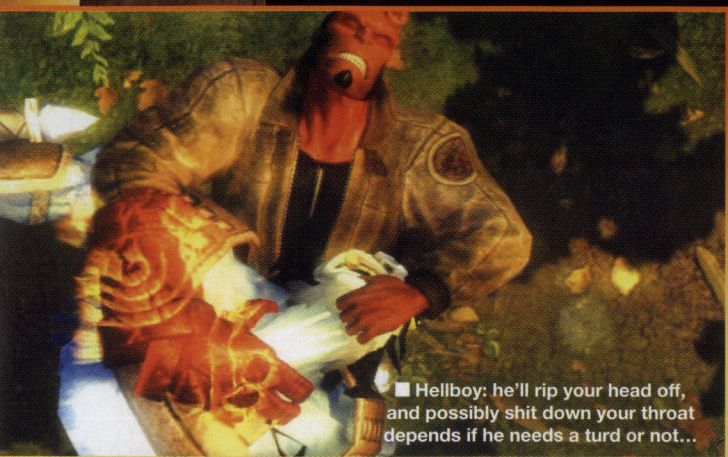
The story centres on a Romanian witch, though it still has the classic Hell and Nazi elements the character is known for. For that authentic feel, they went to Romania to capture some of the aesthetics and, for lack of a better word, spookiness. Attempting to get a guide to some of the more "cursed" locales Stuart mentioned there were some parts even the locals didn't



■ "Whoa! Easy. All I'm saying is you're a bit hairier than what I'm used to"



With a cult comic property and major motion picture franchise under its belt, Hellboy is running hotter than Hades right now... even hotter than Hansel (and he's so hot right now). Come with us as we journey into the depths of Hell and see what's in store for our demon slaying juggernaut.



■ Hellboy: he'll rip your head off, and possibly shit down your throat depends if he needs a turd or not...



■ It's hammer time (it's always hammer time in this magazine)



even venture into, and they were warned to stay away...now that's realism for ya!

IT ALL SOUNDS GOOD. BUT CAN I WAIL ON PEOPLE WITH THE RIGHT HAND OF DOOM?

Oh baby! Oh yes!! Not so much "wail", more like destroy. Your default move is the Right Hand of Doom, a couple of quick taps and its clobberin' time! In keeping with the comics the Right Hand of Doom is enormous and packs a mean punch. We were told that one of the original concepts was to use the glowing runes on it as your health gauge, which sounds great in theory, but once executed was not as clear as they'd hoped for, so they went with the more traditional fade-in/fade-out on screen HUD. They did, however, keep the glowing runes, which give off a small amount of ambient light, clearly visible in dark chambers or at night. Its brightness intensifies during combat as well, which is a slick touch. It looks kick-ass, whoops some serious ass, and though a little slow due to the wind-up, is a great deal of fun to use as you paste some poor sap with the money shot. Each shot charges up like a

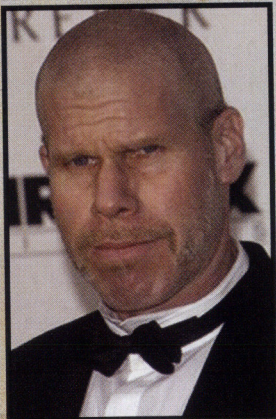
haymaker from *Fight Night* and connects with an almighty thud! Health regenerates over time, but a quick bit of acrobatics hastens the process. Gear up for an aerial attack and jump to deliver a crushing windmill blow that not only trounces the competition but also gives you a health booster shot (and your partner as well in multi-player). All finishing moves and follow throughs have a neon *Akira* style trail from the runes. They look terrific and create a contrast from the darkness that surrounds you.

But is that all we can do with the Right Hand of Doom you say? Hell no! You can grab some of the smaller sized enemies (Bambines, that also swarm in packs) when they jump on your back, you can wrestle and grapple your opponents, or you can just pick up loose objects like barrels or even rip iron bars off fences, imbue them with hellfire, and go ballistic to your heart's content. What we really liked is when carrying an iron bar or large metal crucifix, you nonchalantly hang it over your shoulder. It bears a striking resemblance to the way the boomstick is carried by another classic Hell fighting hero named Ash from the *Evil Dead* series. After bringing the hammer down on some of the larger sized opponents we noticed that if you performed a finishing move (ala *God of War*) not only do you send them back to Satan, but you nick their weapon as well. One of our favourite levels had us going toe to toe with some Japanese samurai demons that appeared as ghostly apparitions with masks, materialising with massive katanas. As we trounced them one by one under the cherry blossoms, we



YOU DA MAN!

We're sure most of you, by now, are familiar with the *Hellboy* movie by off the chain director Guillermo del Toro. When casting the lead, there was only one option. The man, the myth, the legend... Ron Perlman. Though pushing sixty, if you take a gander at Mike Mignola's comic rendition of the character, it even looks like Ron, sans make-up. To keep the continuity going he lends his vocal chords to our big red buddy with his trademark quips and wonderful dry sense of humour.



■ That tongue is blatantly too big for his mouth. Just like Jamie Oliver...


pinched their swords, axed them and then watched as they disappeared in an exquisite spiralling swirl of leaves and wind.

GOOD SAMARITAN

Now everybody loves a Good Samaritan. Who doesn't? Helping you out whenever you're in a bind, by your side when you're in a jam. But there are good Samaritans and there are "send you to meet your maker with a dash of fire and brimstone" Samaritans. We favour the latter. For those not in the know, we're referring to the choice little hand cannon that Hellboy sports in the old hip holster. We love anything of that calibre (cue Dr Evil pinkie smirk). It makes a .44 Magnum look like a cap gun. Though limited in ammo, this awesome little six-shooter comes equipped with a bullet for every occasion. Certain stages require you to light specific lanterns to break a spell and thus allowing you to proceed to the next level. Pick up the right ammo and KABLAMMO! You're on your way. Other crypts will need to be cleansed of evil presence. Grabbing a hold of some lilac infused projectiles (we swear it's not as gay as it sounds) frees the spirits, and sends you on your merry way. It creates a myriad of options, and though the Right Hand of Doom is your go-to attack, the right shot at the right time can definitely swing the tide in your favour.

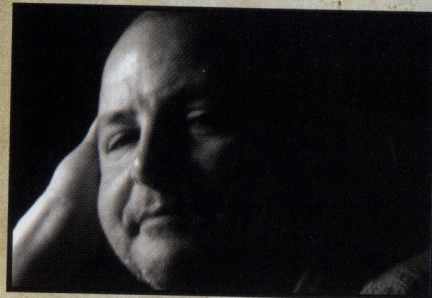
So it's all certified cool right about now, right? Well it gets a little cooler. Not only can you bash your way through the levels as the big red mean machine, but you can also play through

as Abe Sapein, Liz, and a secret undisclosed fourth character. Each is voiced by their movie counterparts and has a variety of different moves, more in tune with their characters. Abe moves very gracefully, though doesn't pack the punch that Hellboy does. This is offset by his triple shot pistol. Liz doesn't do the whole hand-to-hand thang. She prefers the burn you to a crisp type thang. Since she doesn't carry a firearm, Krome have boosted her pyrotechnics. Exquisitely rendered blue fire emanates around her, and bucking the trend, they've totally ignored fireballs opting instead for some levitation and expanding rings of fire. Each attack is punctuated with a surprisingly sensual/erotic grunt (or maybe it's just our dirty little minds) and even Selma Blair had a giggle about it when we caught an interview with her, saying she spent days with Mike and Guillermo, moaning and grunting like a porn star to a room filled with directors and technicians. The inclusion of the cast of side characters creates a well-balanced roster, as well as a decent whack of replayability. You can also get some split-screen multi-player on, and they've hinted at online play, though nothing has been confirmed as yet.

We've been happily surprised by what we've seen from Krome, the little battler that could, and it's gratifying to see local developers getting a go. It's even more gratifying to see them succeed, and this is just the beginning on next gen. We're interested to take a peek at the next step in their journey. We'll just have to wait and see... 

CREATIVE LICENSE

Bucking the trend of touchy feely "this property is my heart and soul" comic creators, Mike Mignola is more than happy to let others run with his baby. When chatting to Creative Director Steve Stamatiadis he mentioned that Mike was very "hands off" and excited and intrigued to see what direction others would take Big Red in. Though he still had input in the overall look, he loved the concepts and ideas that Krome came up with.



■ "Ahaha! Stop licking me! That tickles. Alright, I'm serious! Now you get a red fist up your arse"

5

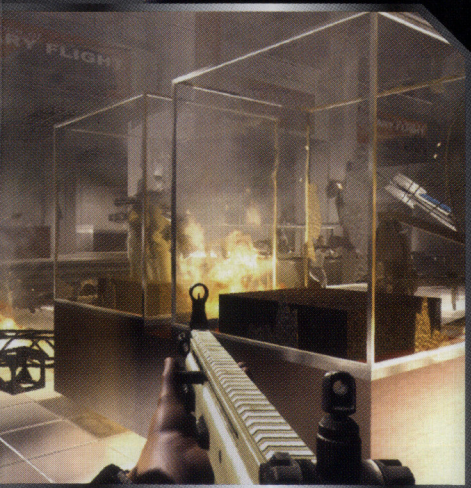


Shaken AND Stirred

Words: Adam Mathew

James Bond; women want him and men want to be him (and to be entirely accurate, some men want him and some women want to be him, too). Not us though, we'd rather be Q, or maybe Jaws. Think about it, Q spends all day figuring out how to outfit a porta-loo with a flamethrower or how to make ordinary household shit explode - and Jaws is an indestructible powerhouse who chomps anyone who pisses him off, sharks included... we want to be *that* guy.





FEATURE

Quantum of Solace



■ Where is everybody? I want to shoot someone real bad!



■ "With a fringe like this life isn't worth living... Goodbye cruel world!"



Personal fantasies and uncompleted DIY dental augmentation aside, when Vanessa told me that she wanted to send me to Treyarch studios in L.A. to check out *Call of Duty: World at War* and another mysterious game that offered up some sweet, sweet 'Bondage', I told her I was a big fan and I said yes on the spot. Unfortunately for all involved, I'd completely forgotten that Activision has the rights to the new Bond film franchise, and when I rocked up at Activision LA decked out in a leather facemask holding a brand spanking new spanker pad and sporting the arse-less PVC chaps that came bundled with it; Activision security understandably caught me by the scruff of my dog collar and took me aside for a quiet word. Apparently 'Bondage' is popular street slang for 'an awesome experience with some sweet, sweet James Bond like activities portrayed within'. Everybody was surprisingly cool about the mix up though, apparently they'd already had a few incidents earlier with some similarly misguided journo's.

One quick cab ride and a wholesome wardrobe change later, I was ushered through the Treyarch research facility and given a tantalizing glimpse of *Quantum of Solace*, a first person shooter running on the much vaunted *Call of Duty 4* engine. We have to say, Activision have nabbed the license at a very opportune time too, because James Bond as we know it has seen something of a reinvention recently – a good reinvention too, not like the onscreen abortion that was George Lazenby or the *Miami Vice* experience that was *License to Kill*. Fans of the new films will be happy to note that this game spans the plot of these two recent Bond adventures *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace* (which, incidentally picks up an hour after the conclusion of *Casino*). This is a fantastic 'clean slate' opportunity for Treyarch and hopefully they can use it to change what we've come to expect from the *Bond* games, rather than some of EA's efforts which were just lame side stories that didn't do the tuxedoed super spy justice. Yes, *Agent Under Fire* and *Nightfire*, we're looking squarely in your goddamn direction.

Bond Appetit: Casino Royale with Cheese

To pull this off they're approaching the license with the same hard-line look and feel of the character that Daniel Craig portrayed. Yes, Mr Craig shocked the hell out of critics and your mates by stepping up in *Casino Royale* and delivering a James Bond that was cold, ironic and brutal, a portrayal that won him instant acclaim and was only slightly marred by him wearing budgie smugglers in that beach scene. Speaking of *Casino Royale*, our demo kicked off in a 'behind the scenes' firefight that occurs during the poker tournament break. James tails Le Chiffre to some upper suites and observes him being detained by some of his disgruntled guerilla customers. As he is escorted away we immediately noticed how strikingly spot on the Mads Mikkelsen model looks, even down to the freaky bleeding left eye. Similarly the Daniel Craig model was disturbingly lifelike and was voiced by the man himself.

Jumping into the game we were instantly introduced to a 3rd person cover system not unlike the one seen in *Rainbow Six Vegas 2*. With it, blindfiring and popping in and out of cover is extremely intuitive, plus it includes a contextual button that makes Bond 'SWAT turn' across to parallel cover. Expanding upon this feature, you can also point your aiming reticule on cover ahead your current position and tap a button to automatically roadie run yourself there. To begin with we ignored these cover options and approached the game as a run and gun experience, heavily handedly wading into the lush hotel environment unloading our unsilenced (and beautifully modeled) mp5 submachine gun. To our credit – it began well – but pretty soon the mofos that didn't eat a lead salad sandwich in the first barrage reacted intelligently by actively seeking cover and working as a group to flush us out or destroy our cover completely.

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AND ALREADY A LEGEND BY NOW.

FEATURE

Quantum of Solace



■ So, what are we looking at here?



■ "Hmm. Shhhteamy..."

■ Taking cover – probably a bit excessive since there's no one here, except that janitor guy...



The name's Explosion... Roger, Explosion

Under this onslaught we took some enemy slugs and Bond's vision began to swim, after a few more hits the classic 'blood barrel' crept in on our peripheral and steadily began to cover the screen. If we'd kept our wits about us and our head down this would have eventually disappeared, but unfortunately some bastard flanked us and the barrel closed fully and we were treated to the iconic blood wash down the screen and the 'you suck' guitar twang.

At this point the executive producer reminded us that Bond's greatest weapon is his guile and, though the game does offer a straight up shooter experience, the fact is Bond isn't John Rambo – so it pays to keep a sharp eye out for advantages.

Restarting the level we played it smarter and busted out some suave moves to win through. First of all we selectively chose our battles by avoiding certain rooms and sighting down the barrel of our silenced P99 pistol to quietly and accurately cap people.

Secondly, we took time to observe the patrolling enemies, and snuck up on them using the crouch and a subtler touch on the analog stick. If you manage to do this properly and you're within range, a contextual button will pop up and James will discreetly eliminate them by snapping their neck like a chicken, or pushing their sorry arse off a balcony. Sweet.

Jumping over the railing of said balcony we also avoided an entire hallway of gun toting guerillas by sliding past them along a series of window ledges. To help us the camera swung out of first person giving us a vertigo inducing shot of James and a sizeable 'picture in picture' shot of what our enemies were doing in the room, and where they were currently looking. Tense stuff, but all in a days work for 007.

After much slinking about with the occasional bit of problem solving, mixed in with some good old fashioned air

conditioner vent crawling, we dropped down into a beautiful indoor bathhouse which was host to an epic firefight between Le Chiffre's personal bodyguards and some guerrillas. We won't spoil it for you, but we will say this: we got our hands on an assault rifle, many a bad man got to do the classic 'jitterbug' machine gun death dance, and we made certain that the decorative marble statues all lost very important parts of their anatomy. Good times.

Once this confrontation wrapped up we begged for more and were given a very quick glimpse of the famous parkour scene – the one in Madagascar where Bond chases the bomb maker through a construction site. Mixing first person control with contextual action button pressing, Treyarch have done a stellar job of recreating the energy of the scene.

This was done by a pumping soundtrack and some more fantastic use of the 'picture in picture' effect which popped up to show us what our spider monkey-like prey was getting up to.

Beyond this teaser, Treyarch stayed pretty mum about any further details. They ruled out a poker minigame (damn), they looked at me funny when I asked if it would be doing the 'awesome' ten second car chase in *Casino Royale* when Bond crashes his Aston Martin and flips it seven times, and they wouldn't offer any details on the second film.

Annoyance aside, consider yourselves forewarned, this game is looking pretty damn good; 'suave' good, 'sophisticated' good – dare I even say it – 'spankily' good. And this is coming for a long time lover of 'bondage'. ♫

The next Quantum Leap...

Insiders have confirmed that the second film continues right after *Casino Royale*'s conclusion, when Mr. White is shot and captured by Bond at Lake Como. The official synopsis shows that White reveals to Bond and M that his organisation (called Quantum) has agents in Her Majesty's Government and the Central Intelligence Agency. Of his character, Daniel Craig said that Bond is "still too headstrong and doesn't always make the right decisions" and he is "a very human and flawed assassin, a man who has to navigate a morally complex and often cynical world while attempting to hold onto his deep beliefs of what is right and wrong".





PlayStation Portable

PlayStation 2



PIMPS
BURN RUBBER
GIMPS
EAT DIRT



ATV OFFROAD FURY

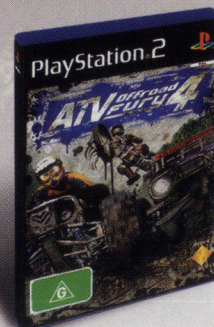
THE DIRTIER THE BETTER

It's not the winning that counts, it's the taking part.
Break the rules, break some bones. Damage, destroy
and demolish. Whatever it takes to be the last
man standing.

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PG

Mild coarse
language



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A SHIP CALLED ISHIMURA.

Taking dismemberment to previously untold levels of 'eek', *Dead Space's* Executive Producer Glen Schofield guides us through mechanical failures, zero-g and Necromorphs as we join the C.E.C!

Good Morning ladies and Gentleman. We are delighted to welcome you aboard.

Our destination today is the desolate mining ship Ishimura.

Please ensure that your seat belt is fastened, your seat back is upright and your tray-table is stowed. At Concordance Extraction Corporation your safety is our first priority.

Of course once we reach our destination you will probably die a horrible and brutal death by one the many variety of aliens known as Necromorphs. So, perhaps you may want to start praying that we explode on take off or get lost in the midst of space junk that we've been pumping up there for the last few hundred years.

Enjoy your flight!

OPS: Having jumped onboard we're keen to know how an 'ordinary man,' like Isaac takes on the horrors of *Dead Space*, you'd expect that a engineer isn't military trained or a marksman?

GLEN SCHOFIELD: Exactly the point. We wanted to put an ordinary person in an extraordinary and horrible situation. That's what makes it even more terrifying. He isn't a marine, doesn't have the weapons or the training but grows during the game. It's a huge part of the story and the gameplay.

OPS: Will we be able to wander off into the face of different path and get lost in the terror?

GS: Yes there are alternate ways

to traverse a Deck in the ship. This is where your map really comes in handy. We did this so you could choose what objective you wanted to do first. It's not an open world though. There are things that need to get done in a certain order to traverse the game. I can guarantee you'll be scared and tense.

OPS: Are there any other characters along the way or are you truly alone in space, will no-one hear you scream?

GS: Yes, there are other characters, but like any good horror flick you'll find yourself alone much of the time. But the other characters play a huge role in the game and the story. There are some great twists with them as well. A wild ending to the game is in

store for the player. It's a wild, scary, tense and horrifying experience.

OPS: What's keeping you up right in the game, will gravity play a role in gameplay?

GS: Gravity and actually zero-gravity play a huge role in the game. We have many areas and puzzles that are in zero-g and some, which require you to turn gravity on or off to get through. In general it's a huge feature and one that differentiates us from any other survival horror game.

OPS: Obvious sound, or lack of, will play an important part of the horror. How have you worked to capture the right atmosphere via sound?

GS: Sound design is paramount



■ "What the hell, who designed this helmet – Helen Keller? How am I supposed to see out of this thing!"





■ "Argh! It's the Spice Girls..."

"IT'S A WILD, SCARY, TENSE AND HORRIFYING EXPERIENCE"

to making a great, scary and tense experience. We spend so much time with the audio and have quite a large and talented audio team. We knew right from the start how critical audio design was for a horror game. Timing of the audio, pacing, lack of audio, bumps, creaks and creature sounds all make this an extremely tension filled game.

OPS: The Necromorphs are unique, how are they different from other survival horror creatures?

GS: They're different in oh so many ways. First of all there are a multitude of ways to try and kill

and dismember them. They have so much sophisticated AI and animation. For example: cut off their legs and the aliens will keep coming at you. Slice off the head and they'll madly come slash towards where you are. In addition some of the characters also have AI for both gravity and zero-g, and in general we spent so much time coming up with some twisted, unique and sick creatures. The more you get into the game the more insanely demented they get.

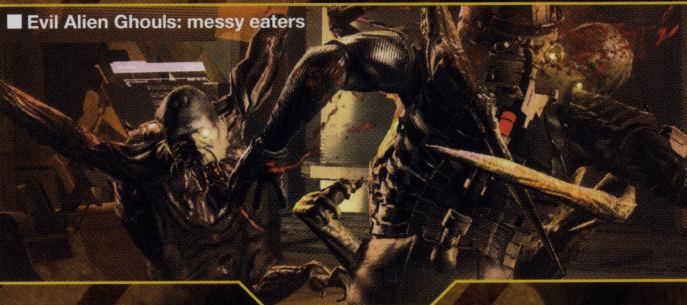
OPS: The HUD is different to what we're use to, how does it work? How does this change the experience of the game?

GS: We spent so much time working on an innovative HUD design. What we wanted was no HUD on the screen but actually in the game as if its seen and used by Isaac, not the player. So he has a holographic inventory and map HUD in-game and his health, ammo and other meters are part of his suit or his RIG as we call it. Its pretty

damn cool and now whenever I play a game with a HUD it seems "old school" to me.

OPS: There's a six part comic releasing in the lead up to the game, where did the idea spring from?

GS: It grew organically from our story. We've been writing the story and backstory for a couple of years. We have tons and tons of backstory and details on what happened before the game and the origins of



■ Evil Alien Ghouls: messy eaters



■ Uh, not tonight honey. I've got a headache...
yeah, a terrible headache



■ "You're not putting me in da coolah!"

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// P2
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// I AM LEGEND
// SOUTHLAND TALES
// GOLDEN COMPASS
// FUTURAMA
// DOCTOR WHO
// HOUSE OF THE DEAD
// INCANDESCENCE

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Feature
Inside!

The hero is back!

INDIANA JONES

Everything you didn't know about its making!

"YES, IT'S
VERY COOL!"

Exclusive Iron Man interview



Arthur C Clarke
remembered
Looking back at the
life of a genre legend



Star Wars:
The Clone Wars
The latest news



GO SPEED RACER!

The Wachowskis
reload for the
anime classic



THE THING

Revisiting John
Cusack's brilliant

FIRST EXHILARATING ISSUE
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FEATURE

Interview



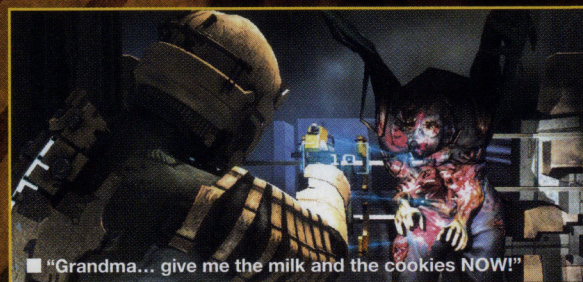
■ "Marco..." "Polo..."

all that took place in the years and months leading up to it. At some point we realized we had a huge and wonderful story that was too big for just a game. We wanted to find other mediums to enrich and further expand and tell our story for the interested fan. So we have a 6 comic book series and an animated feature all leading up to the game story. You don't need to know all the backstory to play the game,

but taken all together they create a fantastic tale. Nothing to do with hype or anything.

OPS: How gore filled and gratuitous can we expect Dead Space to be?

GS: On a scale of 1 to 10 *Dead Space* is an 11, absolutely no doubt. Its not really gratuitous really, its just realistic. But we are pushing it to the limit.



■ "Grandma... give me the milk and the cookies NOW!"



■ This what we want to do to our mechanic when he charges \$500 for labour...



Eddy: r u sure bout that answer?

Lucky7: Yep, lock it in Eddy!

Bean: No, it's "B"

Billy: I can't eat another bite!

Tia: More for me then :)

Woody: Tree huggers unite!

BBoiz: Virtual world?

Me190: Real friends!

RokGod: Check out my skull guitar.

iTech: But can you play any tunes?

G-Bling: Note 2 self, heels & stairs don't mix.

Shaggy: Ok, now shake...

Pluto: Woof woof!

AdamWest: HaHa no-one will find me here...

PunkyB: Hey u comin to da party?

EmoKid: Fo sho bro! See ya there :)

Grimace: One slime lime, on da rocks tks.

McHair: Wicka wicka!

Pinky89: Hey there sexy! :)

cMyVest: You talkin' to me?

Bunny: Do I need a ticket to get in?

NateDawg: It's FREE! Get in and hang out!

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ONLINE

The latest PS3 Network news, online reviews, reader online section and more!

CHECK OUT...

...all this juicy online goodness



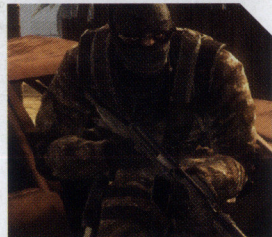
Quake Wars

This one's straight off the meat rack, the newest thing on the store at time of writing. Hop onto the cutting edge and download this frag-fest now! Vehicular madness ahoy – well worth a gander for FPS fans.



Guitar Hero 3

The GH3 track packs have been admittedly lackluster as of late, but we feel that Activision have turned the corner with this one, featuring *The Kaiser Chiefs*. Best *Guitar Hero* DLC yet? Possibly...



Battlefield: Bad Company

If you want a delicious taste of *Battlefield*'s insanely detailed destructive environments, then this is as good a chance as any. Get on it soldier, the multiplayer is off the chain.



PJM Theme

We don't normally feature themes here, unless they happen to be particularly spanking, and this new theme is as sharp as they come, get it – then get *PJM Encore*! Can't get enough of those monsters.



DBZ: Burst Limit

As cel-shaded anime based fighters go *Burst Limit* is one of the best. Don't believe us? Then check this out, for some smooth, Dragonball-tastic beat 'em up action.



Resident Evil 5

Please. Please. Please come out in 2008. Please. We need you. We need you right now. This new trailer is pretty much in-game footage from start to finish. Consider us completely blown away.



SHIKI-TEI

Made in Japan

Shikitei is one of those games that seemingly come out of nowhere, but it's a wonderfully intriguing title with a unique concept: you have a garden to tend. That's it. There isn't any ending to work towards, there's no Game Over screen either, and you can forget about power-ups. Instead, you'll be given a choice of Japanese or English garden environments, and then granted the freedom to design your own patch of paradise,



planting flora, putting up outhouses and garden ornaments, and even inviting animal species (such as foxes and squirrels) to inhabit the verdant scene you've created.

You'll be able to take photographs of your garden, and there will be an online photo gallery where you can compare your efforts with those of other players. The word 'shikitei' means "garden of four seasons" and as time passes seasonal changes will take an effect on how your garden looks and grows, which should add some depth to the garden-rearing process. Most of the staff working on Shikitei are female, and it's fair to say the game is looking mighty pretty as a result of the ladies' design work. We really hope Shikitei doesn't end up as a Japan-only obscurity, but there is that distinct possibility as we haven't heard anything about an English-language version. Say it ain't so, Sony.

FIRMWARE UPDATE

It's no secret that we've been getting a bit pissed off with the consistent stream of updates that should really be packaged as one large update. There's nothing worse than having to take a solid 30 minutes to download and install an update when all you want to do is play one game of *COD4*. That being said, 2.40 is set to be the big one – the in-game XMB that allows players to check their messages without exiting. We can't wait for this one, it should be on its merry way sooner rather than later.

2.40
FIRMWARE
UPDATE



ONLINE
REVIEW



METAL GEAR ONLINE

Think outside the cardboard box...

Now it may come as a small surprise to some of you that we don't all live, breathe, eat, sleep, and shit *Metal Gear Solid* like some of our colleagues do ("cough" "cough" Serrels) so after prying the controller loose from Mark's hands, we managed to hold onto it long enough to check out the online component to find out if it's as sleek and sexy as the main storyline is.

We're happy to report all is good online with just one niggling little concern we must address. Signing up. Pain in the arse doesn't even begin to describe it. After trying to log in we were told to register a Konami ID and password, a Game ID and password (they can't be the same ID either) and then had to go through the whole process again when someone had chosen our name.

We clocked in at one hour to simply register and get online. WTF? Why bother with all that rig-a-ma-role and just use something crazy like, hmmm, we don't know...YOUR GAMERTAG??? On top of that we then had to name our player. Earth to Konami, gamers' like immediate action. Make it easy next time, yeah?

Ok. Enough with the bitching, on with the show. After a limited amount of customisation you kit out your character, choose his attributes and which weapons he's proficient in and you're off

and running (after a long ass wait for players in the lobby). You've got single and team Deathmatch available, capture and rescue missions (with one team the aggressor, the other the defender) and the new Snake missions.

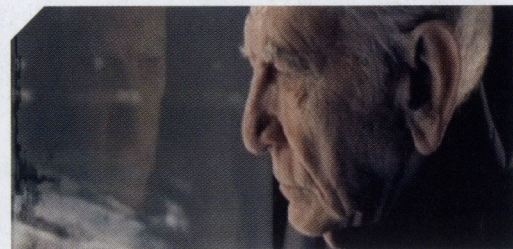
In the Snake mission, one of you is designated as Snake with the camouflage gear, and the others have to find you. Once you've been taken out, you switch sides and join Snake, which is a cool twist. You've got all the weapons the main story does, which can be bought with DPs (Drebin Points) awarded for kills, captures or rescues and you can update your weapons before each round. Here's a tip or two for team based play, pressing triangle to salute at the beginning of each round brings up your comrades' on your HUD, and dropping a girlie mag in the right spot leads to your enemy having a perv, and you getting the drop on them. You can also have a flick through the mags yourself.

Despite the sign up niggles, *MGO* is a pretty good time, and though it is lacking the classic characters the franchise is known for, it is still a solid effort that should keep you sneaking around long after you knock out the single player campaign.

★★★★★



LOLGASM

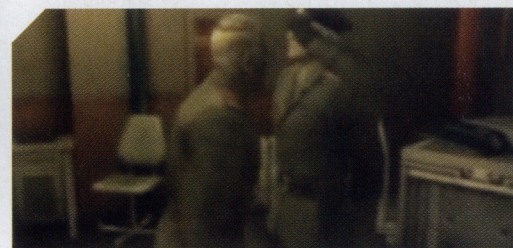


Killzone 2 vs Halo 3

At this point we're still a bit cynical with regards to whether *Killzone 2* will be all it's cracked up to be, but we remain positive. That being said, it *looks* absolutely fantastic, and this humourously edited video, taking elements from Microsoft's *Halo 3* ad campaign, shows that with gusto. Put that in your pipe and smoke it Bungie!

Watch it at: <http://www.gamevideos.com/video/id/14780>

Or Google: Killzone 2 vs Halo 3

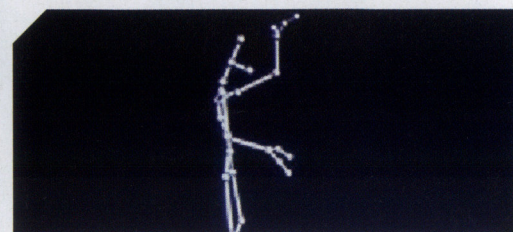


Grabbed by the Balls

We love *Metal Gear Solid*, that's well documented, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we haven't watched some of the series' extensive cut-scenes with a twisted, cringing embarrassment. This video is a celebration of all that's uber gay about *MGS*: in all its ball grabbing glory

Watch it at: video.aol.com/video-detail/top-5-mgs-most-embarrassing-moments/2495385400

Or Google: Top 5 embarrassing MGS moments



Merc Lovin'

This is solid gold: one of the dudes getting mo-capped for the upcoming *Mercenaries 2* manages to escape from the studio, and starts chatting up the secretary. Before long, he's getting down to business, but since he's forgotten to take off his mo-cap suit, the engineers get a gander at the entire thing.

Watch it at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GM5ciQPsYQ

Or Google: Mercenaries 2 Extracurricular

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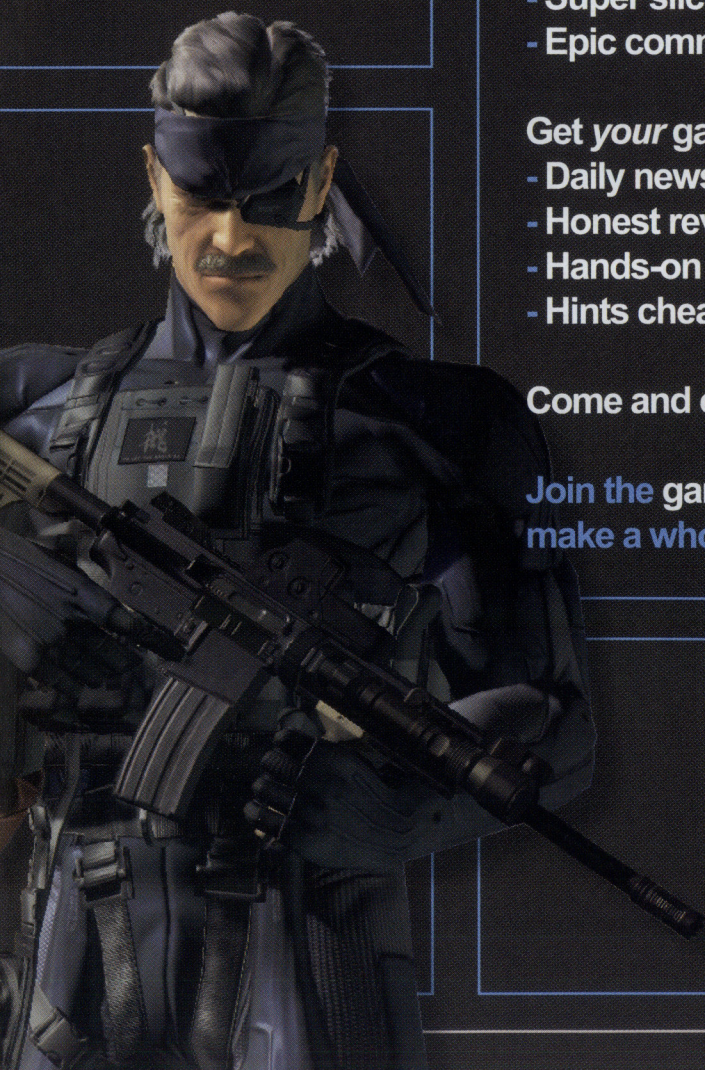
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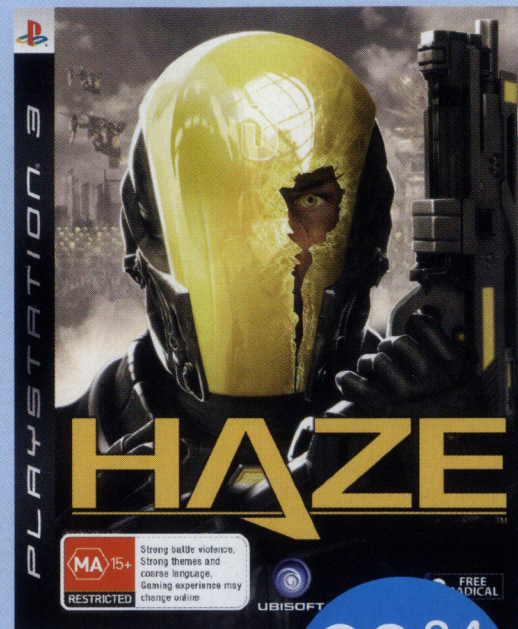
78⁸⁴

EVERYDAY LOW PRICE



93⁸⁴

EVERYDAY LOW PRICE



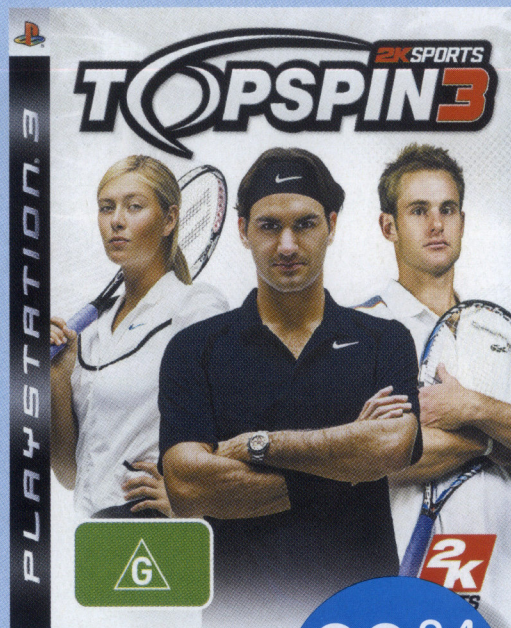
93⁸⁴

EVERYDAY LOW PRICE



93⁸⁴

EVERYDAY LOW PRICE



93⁸⁴

EVERYDAY LOW PRICE



98⁸⁴

EVERYDAY LOW PRICE



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REVIEWS

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REVIEW RATINGS

01 Reserved for the very worst that developers have to offer.

Essentially, anything that receives this score has no redeeming qualities whatsoever. A game receiving this score could not possibly be any worse, unless it was broken from the outset (or gave you cancer, or killed your dog). A game that should never have even survived its first pitch – as bad as it gets.

02 A terrible, terrible game. There may be one or two

things about this game that work, or aren't actually broken, but they are so hopelessly outnumbered by the sheer quantity of badness that they basically cease to exist. Maybe it has a clever name, maybe the concept was sound – but virtually every single thing about it is bad beyond belief. Not worth the effort.

03 Very disappointing. A game with this score is

fundamentally flawed in a number of extremely vital ways. There may be one or two things that could've been done somewhat worse than they have been, but for most part it's totally uninspired, boring and unappealing in every way. There are games that are worse, but there's not that many.

04 Poor. There may be parts of this game that are

vaguely fun, and it may be robust enough in a few departments, but the overall package is lacking any significant reason to stick it out. Games receiving this score may show initial promise, or sound good at first, but will be unrefined, undercooked and let down by shoddy execution and poor attention to detail.

05 Mediocre. In the strictest terms, 50% is a pass – just.

Unfortunately, a game receiving this score will have had just as many things go wrong with it as go right, and that really isn't enough to succeed. A game receiving this score will probably be entertaining in parts without excelling anywhere, yet equally sub-par in others without being outright awful.

06 Decent enough, although still lacking a certain

something. A game receiving this score will be sound, but will have some fairly glaring faults and your interest will probably wane pretty quickly. It will have a number of limitations that will probably turn off more than a few gamers, but will get just enough right to keep dedicated fans of the genre ploughing through.

07 Good. A robust, fun game that's well worth a look,

although will only rarely amaze. A game receiving this score will have more or less accomplished nearly all it set out to do in a decent fashion, but it will have some noticeable problems that prevent it from being as good as it could be. Nevertheless, they generally won't ruin the overall gaming experience.

08 Great. A game receiving this score comes highly

recommended. A combination of some odd issues, minor problems or a lack of innovation may hamper it somewhat, but the overall impression it leaves it very positive. Very entertaining, very satisfying and you wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to others. Well ahead of the pack in most departments.

09 Excellent. Outstanding in almost every way.

Some negligible blemishes will just keep it from being held aloft as a true masterpiece, but it is very likely the best in its field. Most elements of this game will be truly remarkable and you'll be hard-pressed to find too many other games of greater quality. An astonishing game that leaves all but the very best behind.

10 Incredible. Everything went right during the creation of this game.

A game receiving a perfect 10 does not necessarily mean it is perfect, likely just teasingly close, but to reserve 10s for THE perfect game is pointless. Instead, a 10 represents a game of gobsmacking brilliance, a game that stands high above the rest and a game that you cannot afford to ignore. A masterpiece.

THE OPS AWARDS

PlayStation
GOLD AWARD
 10/10

The Gold Award

is a rare gem and only to be given to games that score that magic 10/10. This score indicates gaming of simply incredible quality!

PlayStation
SILVER AWARD
 9/10

The Silver Award

is for games that receive 9/10. If you see this, it's a sign of star quality, indicating that you should buy this game now!

PlayStation
BRONZE AWARD
 8/10

The Bronze Award

is for games that score 8/10. These games are highly recommended and are 100% guaranteed to satisfy.

OPS REVIEW SETUP



We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Bravia X-series for the best picture possible. This sucker melts eyeballs...

INSIDE...



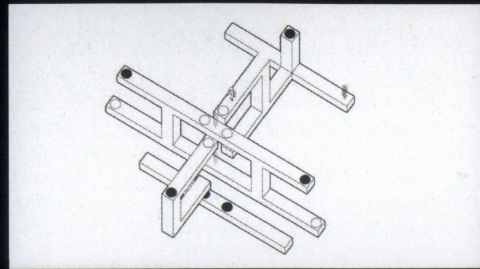
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

Blow (almost) everything up! – page 72



BUZZ! QUIZ TV

Be an annoying know-it-all smartarse! – page 80



ECHOCHROME

Make your brain grow bigger! – page 83

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

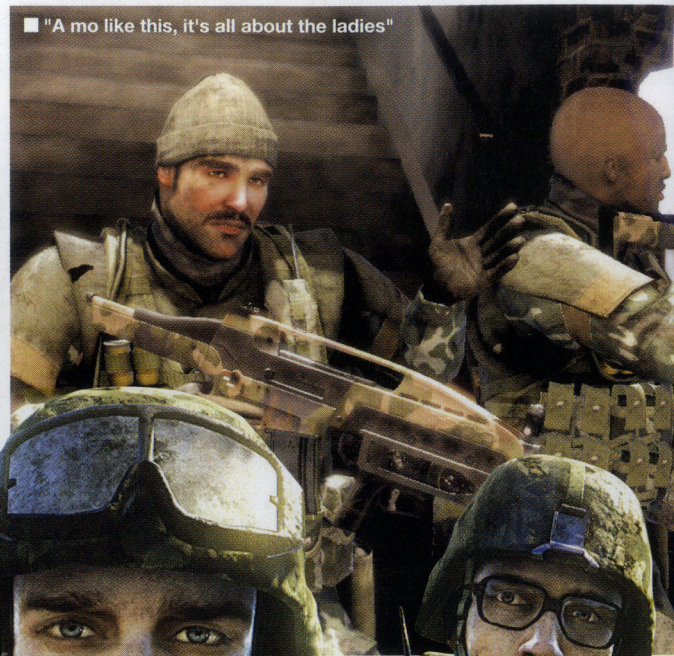
■ **GENRE:** SHOOTER
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** DICE
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA

■ **PLAYERS:** 1 (2-24 ONLINE)
■ **PRICE:** \$99.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.battlefield.com

■ **BACK STORY:** You'll spend your time in *Bad Company* in, well, some bad company. But DICE has done a great job with your NPC amigos. Sgt Redford, Haggard and Sweetwater are well-drawn characters supported by quality voice acting.



■ Ooops! My bad



■ "A mo like this, it's all about the ladies"



■ The boy band 'army look' never really took off!

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

Bad Company has arrived – they love GOLD!

This is a game that makes its intentions clear from the get-go.

Once you load *Battlefield: Bad Company* up, get past the mandatory logo screens and come to the game's front-end proper, the first thing you notice is the music. It's a dirty little jazz riff that somehow just screams 'disreputable'.

When the game itself begins, you're immediately introduced to Bad Company: Company B, 222nd Army Battalion, to be precise. A holding pen for misfits, criminals and ne'er-do-wells. 'You', in this case, are Preston Marlowe, and while it's not made clear exactly what you've done to deserve this transfer, you're clearly among the riff-raff.

It's all a little A-Team, really, and

your squad includes Sergeant Redford, the generic gruff Sergeant; Haggard, a redneck demolitions expert with a shotgun and a rocket launcher; and Sweetwater, a nerdy type with a light machine gun. They'll be with you through the game, and their fatalistic sense of humour adds a human touch to proceedings and some welcome comic relief. After enduring a mild hazing as the 'new guy' and running through some simple exercises to get familiar with the controls, it's off to war.

You're fighting in Eastern Europe and at first, it's all by-the-numbers: knock out the artillery so your tanks can advance, hold the village so the bridge won't be blown, call in a mortar strike on the enemy position... standard stuff. Then, a

couple of levels in, you encounter some mercenaries rumoured to be paid in gold. A body search after some combat reveals the rumours to be true and then, well, one thing leads to another and all of a sudden you're heading off in search of loot. From that point on, things get a little crazy.

Each map tells you how many collectible guns and boxes of gold there are to be gathered up, which keeps you searching and exploring the game's levels, which are all pretty big. *Bad Company* has a unique look; some of the environmental textures are a bit on the low-res side when examined up close, but the characters, vehicles and weapons all look and sound great, and the game makes use of filters to give everything a

slightly grainy look, which adds to the atmosphere, as does its excellent use of lighting. It looks gritty and naturalistic, a welcome relief from both the browns and greys that dominate some recent games' colour palettes, and the over-saturated, hyper-real look that infuses others.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

A mini-map remains on-screen at all times, with enemies, allies and objectives clearly indicated, and the full map is available at the touch of a button. Which is just as well, because while the game is quite linear overall (if you venture out of the mission area you're given a countdown to return before an artillery barrage takes you out), you'll enjoy great



INFO BYTE

If you like stories about military units going AWOL, bad, or both, digout your DVDs of *The Dirty Dozen*, *Kelly's Heroes* and *Three Kings*.



■ Jeremy Clarkson: Unleashed on hummers!



"They generally pack some serious firepower (except for the golf buggies, sadly)..."

tactical freedom. That is, your objectives are all laid out before you, but how you go about achieving them is up to you.

Sneak into the base? Hang back and snipe? Call in an air strike? Hijack a vehicle and make a frontal assault? The game doesn't prescribe any approach so you can pick your own methods.

Speaking of vehicles, in true *Battlefield* style, you'll have the chance to drive and pilot a variety of rides, from APCs and tanks, to boats, helicopters and golf buggies. They generally pack some serious firepower (except for the golf buggies, sadly) and there's a nifty vehicle repair item you can pick up to boost a damaged vehicle's 'health' back up to full, though vehicle combats usually boil down to a stand-off with each side pumping rounds into the other. In a tank versus tank battle, perhaps that makes sense. But when your tank is unloading on an APC, you'd think the enemy driver might decide to get out of the line of fire.

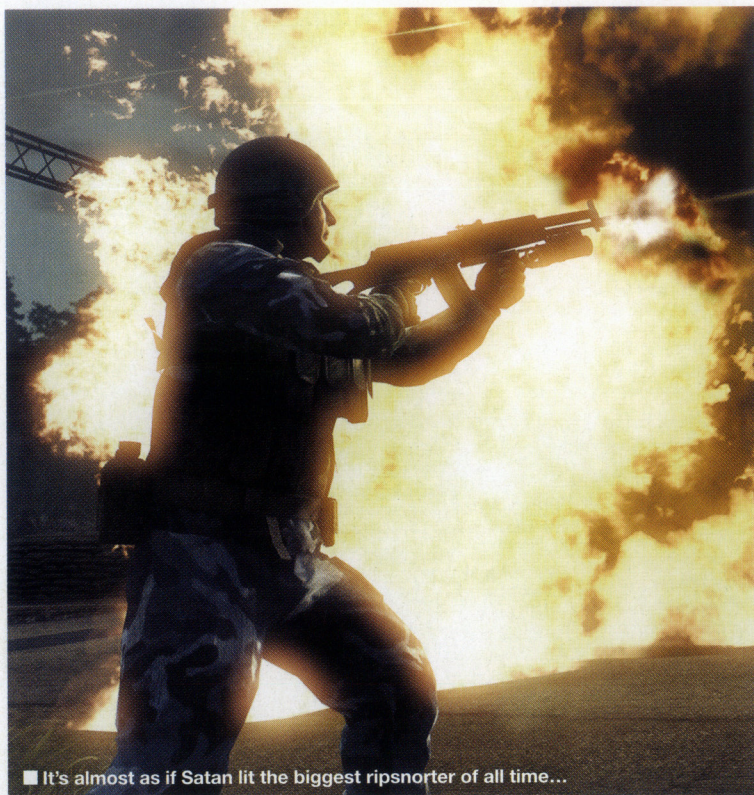
ARMY OF ONE

Overall, the combat in *Bad Company* is pretty good: the guns all handle differently and all sound great; it's easy to switch between weapons; you have an injector that you can use at-will to replenish your health (it has a short recharge time between uses); and the set-piece battles are staged with flair, using stock locations – villages, refineries, golf courses etc. – to good effect. An assault up a wooded hill covered by snipers was distinctly memorable and the urban battles are suitably chaotic.

One thing that really stands out is the destructible terrain. DICE claims that the environment is about 90% destructible, so you can (for example) reduce a building to the barest of frames and rubble. It's quite distressing to sneak through a stand of trees, thinking you're under cover, only for it to be blown apart by incoming fire, or to have your nice little gun emplacement detonate around you. That said, it's enormously satisfying to ferret out a



■ Paintball: elimination. It'll only sting a little



■ It's almost as if Satan lit the biggest ripsnorter of all time...



sniper by demolishing the bunker he was concealed in, or to get a bead on the last bad guy by blowing up the building he was hiding behind.

But it's not perfect; in fact, there are two flies in the combat ointment. The first is the game's AI. For starters, your teammates aren't much help in combat. *Bad Company* isn't a squad-based game, so you don't issue orders; rather, your mates follow your lead and while they can't die, they're lousy shots.

No matter how intense the firefight, their actual contribution to the bodycount is usually minimal.

On the other hand, your enemies are pretty good shots, but their tactics are quite basic. They move and make use of cover, but not in a particularly tactical or intelligent way. Sometimes they're utterly oblivious to what's going on around them (in one assault, a grenade went off on

the wrong side of a guard's cover; he was unharmed but didn't react to the explosion at all); sometimes they seem to be using radar to draw a bead on you despite range and cover.

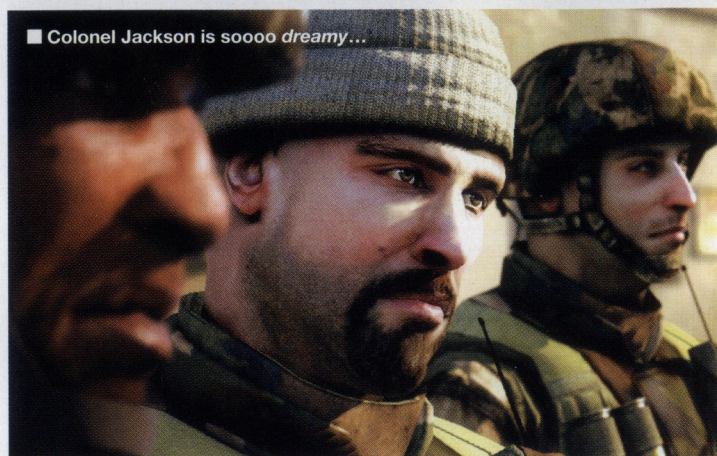
Basic enemy AI is disappointing but not a crippling flaw; *Bad Company's* real problem is its re-spawn system. When you die, you re-spawn at your most recent auto-save point. But the game remembers all the casualties and damage you've inflicted so far.

This takes a lot of the tension and drama out of combat, because you can just keep charging up that hill until all the bad guys are dead, regardless of how many times you get killed. It also means that you can run out of vehicles to commandeer, leaving you to face enemy armour without a tank or APC.

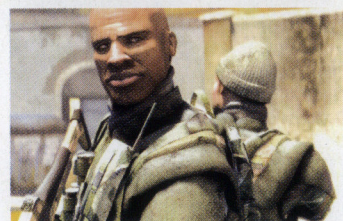
It's a real shame, because in just about every other respect, *Bad Company*



■ "Oh that's a nice keyring" (pull) "Hey everyone! Look at this cool keyring"



■ Colonel Jackson is soooo dreamy...



MULTIPLAYER MADNESS

The *Battlefield* series really made its name as a multiplayer online shooter, so we're pleased to report that *Bad Company* looks set to maintain the series' reputation. *Battlefield: Bad Company* supports up to 24 players online, with a variety of game modes including Goldrush, a territories-style match where one team has to capture boxes of gold and the other has to stop them. It too features destructible terrain, all kinds of vehicles (tanks, APCs, helicopters, boats etc) and some very large maps, and introduces a variety of character classes (Assault, Demolitions, Recon, Specialist and Support). If the recent multiplayer beta test was anything to go by, it should be one of the PS3's best online shooter offerings yet.



has an awful lot going for it. It looks, sounds and feels great. Its story and characters are well-drawn and its black sense of humour is appealing. Destructible terrain, big maps with objectives and points of interest clearly laid out, weapons and gold to collect, vehicles and gun emplacements and artillery and air support... it's got the lot. But basic enemy AI and the re-spawn system hold it back from greatness, so overall it's enjoyable, entertaining and really good, rather than enjoyable, entertaining and really special.

— Michael Butler

PROS:

- Destructible Environments!
- Brilliant multiplayer

CONS:

- Respawn system sucks
- Poor enemy AI

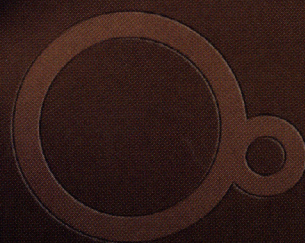
VERDICT: *Bad Company* comes within touching distance of greatness but just falls short.

OFFICIAL
SCORE:

08

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■ **GENRE:** SPORTS
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA

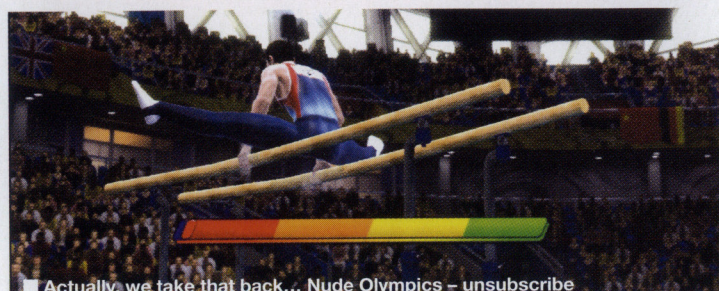
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-8 (ONLINE)
■ **PRICE:** \$99.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.eurocom.co.uk

■ **BACK STORY:** Hey hey! It's the Olympics again, and you know what that means kids! Yes! You get to give yourself a hernia, a brain hemorrhage, and piles all at the same time as you button bash your way to an early grave! Get going everyone!

INFO BYTE

The first recorded Olympics were held in 776 BC at Olympia, Greece. All the athletes were men and they all competed in the nude.

■ Taking Olympics nude again – that's one petition we would sign in a flash...



■ Actually, we take that back... Nude Olympics – unsubscribe



BEIJING 2008

Yes, it's time for another licensed Olympics game...

If button-mashing was an Olympic sport, punters like you and me might just have a shot at glory. Playing *Beijing 2008* would also be a crucial part of our training. Developer Eurocom has had a red-hot go at making this game something more than just a button-fest but memories of aching forearms and cramped fingers are likely to be our most lasting impression of the game.

Beijing 2008 gives us some 35 Olympic sports, grouped into Track, Field, Gymnastics, Shooting, Combined Events, Aquatics and Other (archery, weightlifting, cycling, etc).

It's a good spread of events and the game offers Tutorial, Competition and Olympic Games modes. The first two are single events, and Olympic Games mode allows you to play through an entire Olympiad, from qualifying through to the podium.

To its great credit, the game also offers a full slate of multiplayer options. You can play locally with up to four players, or across a network with up to eight. There'll be online leaderboards but far more promising is the 'Olympic Games' mode, where you can customise your team and compete in a full slate of events, from qualifying through to medal-winning.

Every event has a quick tutorial, which explains the controls but not really how to use them. This is a sticking

point in the less well-known events; for example, Team Pursuit's tutorial explains how to move your bike around the velodrome but doesn't explain (for non-cycling fans) the event's rules nor give any suggestions as to tactics.

Ultimately, it all comes down to either button-mashing, careful timing or a bit of precision stick-work. Eurocom has made a genuine attempt at innovation with the controls, coming up with button-and-stick combinations that try to capture something of each sport's key requirements or techniques.

The balance between offering effective controls and simulating particular sporting events still needs work and we hope to see further refinements, and more complete

tutorials, in the finished game.

Graphically, the game is a let-down. The character environments and models look dated. The PlayStation 3 is capable of significantly better graphics than this, especially in a game where the backgrounds are basically static and there are only ever a few characters on-screen at once.

It also takes forever to move from screen to screen. Loading from a menu selection to an event can take upwards of 30 seconds – and so does quitting out and going backwards! It's a major turn-off.

Beijing 2008 isn't in shape to win gold, but it shows promise. *Beijing 2008* is a fun rental, but far from a game to buy and keep. **Michael Butler**

■ The 'Bum Landing'. Extra difficulty.



THE BIRD'S NEST

The Beijing Olympics promise to be quite the extravaganza, with the Chinese government determined to impress the world. Beijing National Stadium (the 'bird's nest', so-called for its interweaving structure of beams) and the National Aquatics Centre (the 'water cube', so-called for its bubble-like surface) are already stars on the world architectural circuit and they've been faithfully re-created for the game, along with all the other event venues. This lends the game an air of realism it would otherwise be lacking, though the ever-present official signage does get a bit tedious (just like the real thing, really...).



PROS:

- Fun party game
- Most events are here

CONS:

- Poor visuals
- Still a button button basher

VERDICT: Doesn't quite make it to the podium, but not the worst of its type...

OFFICIAL
SCORE:

05

Meet Miss July

MERCEDES PARELLADA

Age: 26

Occupation: Bus driver

Lives: Amsterdam

What kind of men do you like?

I love soldiers. I love men in uniform carrying big guns, it's so hot. There is something about how they are so put together which makes me want to get them all dirty.

Any hobbies?

Gold, I love gold. Gold jewellery, gold forks, gold miniature dogs, gold anything. I need a man who's loaded to fulfill my golden fantasies. There are so many gold things I want, like my underwear made of gold.

What's your favourite book?

I'm reading a book called, "Lonely Soldier." It's about a soldier who falls in love with a stripper from another country while at war. Her family won't let him see her because of the war.

What is a turn on?

Explosions. I love it. It's just pure power. I don't like blowing things up. But I love watching a man do it. It's so hot, it's like he's saying to me, "BAM, I will destroy you lady with my explosive love." It drives me crazy.

What are turn offs?

Men who don't blow stuff up.

What are your plans for the future?

I'd love to enlist in the army. People tell me I have a sweet voice and I think I'd be a great dispatch girl. And I could meet lots of manly soldiers and see nice explosions.

Full pictorial in next month's issue of B.C.

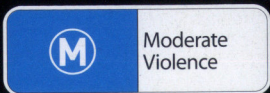


YOU'RE IN BAD COMPANY NOW.

Create your own rules. Blow up almost anything using tactical destruction. And take whatever you want with three of your closest, morally challenged friends.

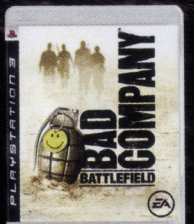


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PLAYSTATION 3

DICE



IN STORE JUNE 26

EABFCPS2

■ **GENRE:** PARTY
 ■ **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
 ■ **DEVELOPER:** SONY
 ■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY

■ **PLAYERS:** 1 - 8
 ■ **PRICE:** \$59.95 (\$109.95 W/MIC)
 ■ **HD:** 720p
 ■ **WEB:** au.playstation.com

■ **BACK STORY:** *SingStar*, as a franchise, is another great Sony success story. This is what social gaming is all about - entertainment that anyone, young or old, casual gamer or hardcore can play and enjoy.

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

SINGSTAR VOL. 2

Tap tap tap. Is this thing on? Ladies and gents, put your hands together...

Now this is where the PlayStation 3's real advantage in the market lies. No other console has a game like *SingStar* that combines great graphics, a simple interface, the guaranteed ability to download new content and at its core, an activity that everybody loves - in this case singing.

By now, we're all familiar with the *SingStar* games, in concept if not in detail, and *SingStar Vol. 2* doesn't deviate from the formula in any significant way. Rather, it presents a number of handy improvements and evolutions, further refining an already-successful formula.

And that formula works well. The game presents songs, karaoke-style, for up to eight players locally or online, and you're judged by pitch rather than key (which definitely helps the vocally-challenged among us). You can sing by yourself, as part of a duo (co-operatively or in competition) or in 'pass the mic' mode, where you, well, pass the mic around between a group of up to eight friends. You can play online, record your performances with your PlayStation Eye and post them - and your scores - online. You can also buy new tracks from the online SingStore to expand your music collection.

But the big question is, why buy another version of *SingStar*?

Firstly, a second singer can now sing harmonies during the duets. This is a great addition, with the screen divided horizontally so each player gets their own vocal and pitch tracks to follow. It doesn't really add much to the game's challenge, but it does add to its 'sing-ability' and we're expecting to see some pretty sweet duet videos posted online.

The second innovation is one that's not entirely unexpected - Remote Play connectivity with the PlayStation Portable. PSP owners can access the SingStore and My SingStar Online using their portable unit. So you can buy tracks and post comments on other people's clips on your lunchbreak at the office.

Frankly, it's not that exciting a feature; Remote Play is a great idea in theory but this is hardly a compelling use for it; we're still waiting for a game - any game - to find a genuinely interesting way to use the ability to access your PS3 remotely with your PSP.

Whether those two innovations are worth the price of entry will likely determine whether you'll want to invest in *SingStar Vol. 2* if you have the original. If you don't it's a no-brainer; if you like singing and have a PS3, there's a tonne of fun to be had. But if you do, you may want to consider how much value you'll really get from the package.

Still, considered solely on its own merits, this is another great *SingStar* offering from Sony and it's highly recommended to all budding vocal heroes. **Michael Butler**

TRACK LIST

- Dude Looks Like A Lady
Aerosmith
- Country House
Blur
- My Prerogative
Bobby Brown
- Pictures of You
The Cure
- Without Me
Eminem
- Freedom '90
George Michael
- Dare
Gorillaz
- Standing In The Way Of Control
Gossip
- You Sexy Thing
Hot Chocolate
- Ruby
Kaiser Chiefs
- When You Were Young
The Killers
- Celebration
Kool And The Gang
- Can't Stand Me Now
The Libertines
- Summer in the City
The Lovin' Spoonful
- California Dreamin'
The Mommies and the Poppas
- Our Velocity
Maximo Park
- Suedehead
Morrissey
- Lithium
Nirvana
- Pretty Fly (For A White Guy)
The Offspring
- But It's Better If You Do
Panic At The Disco
- We All Stand Together
Paul McCartney & the Frog Chorus
- Don't Stand So Close To Me
The Police
- I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)
The Proclaimers
- Common People
Pulp
- Street Spirit
Radiohead
- Stay
Shakespeare's Sister
- TRUE
Spandau Ballet
- Sexbomb
Tom Jones and Mousse T
- Funky Cold Medina
Tone Loc
- Bust A Move
Young MC
- No, we're not kidding about the Paul McCartney track - one for the kids, we suppose...

INFO BYTE

Whatever happened to the 70s? There's only one song here from this decade of incredible music - Hot Chocolate's 'You Sexy Thing'. Now, it's a great song, but nothing else?

OFFICIAL
SCORE:
08

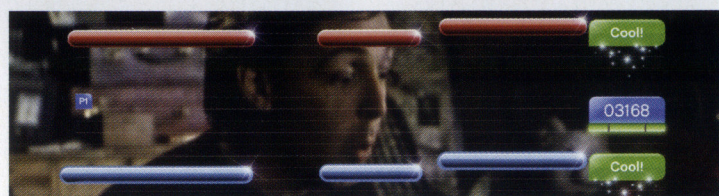
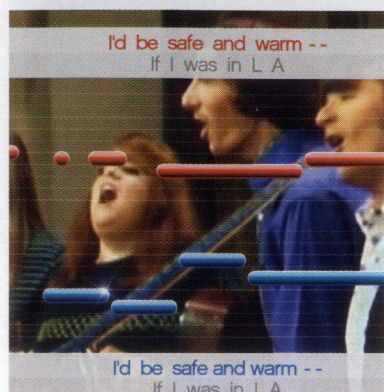
PROS:

- Singing harmonies
- It's *SingStar*!

CONS:

- Non compelling Remote Play
- Not enough 70s

VERDICT: *SingStar Vol 2* is a must-have party game, so long as you don't have the original.



PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

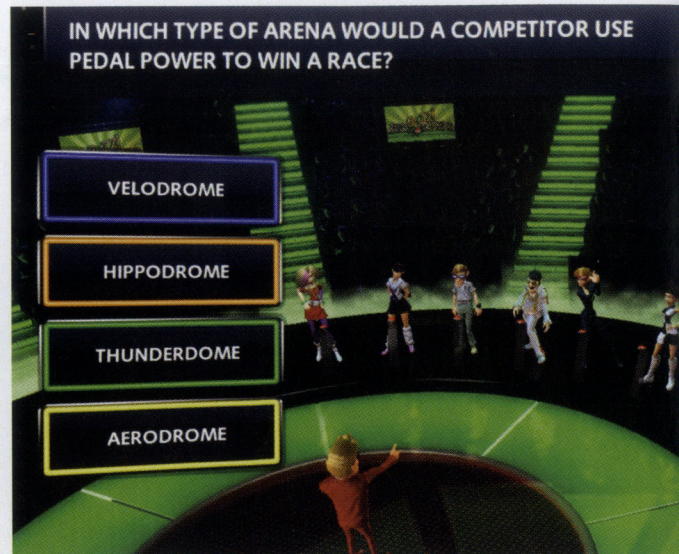
■ **GENRE:** PARTY
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** RELENTLESS
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SOE

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (16 ONLINE)
■ **PRICE:** \$59.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.sony.com

■ **BACK STORY:** With just about every type of trivia under the sun being tackled by the series (so far we've had pop, sports, monsters, schools and Hollywood) why not take a stab at the genre its in? How about next a Buzz! videogame Trivia Game?



■ Yep. This game's called *Buzz!* alright.



■ "Oh, oh! I know! I know! Jeremy Irons."

BUZZ! QUIZ TV

Hang out with your mates and get Buzzed...

Now, we're sure you all know that we are staunch advocates of the whole online revolution thing going on. We wholeheartedly endorse the inclusion of drop-in/drop-out online co-op with just about any game that has you running around shootin' stuff. But there is still something to be said for hanging with your bros, knocking back a few brews and getting the party games on (no Soggy Sao for God's sake!) and it's obvious that we're not alone as the success of *Singstar* and the *Buzz!* franchises will testify. It's that immediate interaction that never gets old. This is the board-game for the next generation, and like *Monopoly* and *Scrabble* before it, seems to be evolving and changing to fit in with the

times, but does *Buzz! Quiz TV* have all the answers, or will a buzzer sound forever leaving it in obscurity?

I'VE GOT YOUR ANSWER RIGHT HERE TREBECK!

From the start, this has got its tongue planted very firmly in its cheek, with the tunes on the menu screen a mix of game show themes with a *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* vibe to it. It decently sets the scene and then it's time to choose the mode of play. You can play in a group, on your own, or online. We'll get to the online bit a little later. Categories are Movies & TV, Music, Knowledge, Sports, Lifestyle or All of the above. Pick your poison and you're off! After a brief intro

with your host (who looks like Terrance or Phillip from *South Park* in 3D) you can pick your avatar from hot babes, superhero/villains, Elvis impersonators, afro dudes, cheerleaders and a few bohemian rockers, once done you're off and running. Don't take too long or your host will chastise you for taking so long to press a damn button.

We couldn't resist playing the comical Vader character. His reactions to the cheers of the crowd were priceless. We especially loved when he pumped his fist, broke into the running man and did the Michael Jackson 'Beat It' kick and other dance moves with each correct answer. The only real gripe was that the graphics didn't really push the PS3 much.



You've got to have an itchy trigger finger here with Stop The Clock awarding you more points for a quick correct answer, and even when blindly choosing a category, if you've got a passing familiarity with each subject, you should score well. The problem was that you're only up against yourself here, and the novelty wears thin very, very quickly. They could have had you at least hit some four-player action with three CPU controlled opponents. Sure it wouldn't be perfect, but at least your interest would be more than fleeting. The single player mode is by far the weakest link in the game, so lets burn past it and straight into multiplayer

A PICK OF THE BOARD...

The gameplay isn't that hard to get a grasp of here, it's just the same as before with a little slant. Points Builder let's you pop the answers out with no pressure and gets you settled. Pass the Bomb is a to and fro between contestants until it explodes costing the loser a bunch of points. Fastest Finger awards more points to whoever answers correctly first, Pie Fight has you pitching pies for every correct answer, two hits and you're out of the round. Point Stealer plays exactly as it sounds and High Stakes has you betting on your answers. It ends with The Final Countdown that sees you on platforms

that rise with the right answer and drop with a wrong one. Get it? Got it? Good!!

COUCH POTATOES OF THE WORLD...UNITE!

What piqued our interest was the awesome online mode. Here you and three buds can go head to head with up to three other couches for worldwide trivia domination. It's a stellar idea and takes the group play to a new level as you work in cahoots with each other to bring the other couches down.

The interweb lovin' don't stop there though. You can also work on a personalised series of questions and

upload them for all to see and play. The possibilities are endless. Imagine a *Metal Gear Solid*/Chuck Norris series put forward by Mark, or an Anime one by Phil, you see where we're going with this, right? You can even make up ones for personal use only, which really makes it a unique experience for you and your know-it-all mates.

We had some serious fun with *Buzz!* Quiz TV, and though it was severely let down by the single player mode, this is predominantly a party/group-based activity that is at it's best when you get a bunch of mates with a couple of cases under their belts. **▀ Dave Kozicki**

"You and three buds can go head to head with up to three other couches for worldwide trivia..."

INFO BYTE

The bargain basement price of under sixty bucks makes this the perfect jump off point if you've never played a *Buzz!* before.

WHICH OF THESE WOULD THIS ACTOR BE SALUTING IN THIS

THE BIG LEBOWSKI

THE BIG GIANT HEAD

THE BIG RED DOG

THE BIG KNIGHTS

XXXXX

WHICH 'BIG APPLE' DOES SPIDER-MAN CALL HOME?

WASHINGTON

CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK

1400

DAVID

0

ERIKA

1000

THOMAS

1400

ANGELA

1400

PROS:

- Cool online component
- Awesome individual quizzes

CONS:

- Weak single player mode.
- Graphics aren't great

VERDICT: Not challenging in single player, yet the online really give this some legs.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

07



WHERE'S THE CHEESE?

In case you're not familiar with the series, *Neighbours* alumni Jason Donovan, provides the voice of your host as he does his best Tony Barber cheese-dick impersonation. Now usually we would happily rip him to shreds, but damn it, the guy is too damn good. He has the perfect level of smarmy host, without being offensive, and as long as he doesn't team up with Craig McLaughlin as comic relief (groan), we say let him do the voodoo, that he do, so well...



PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ **GENRE:** FIGHTER
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** DIMPS
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ATARI

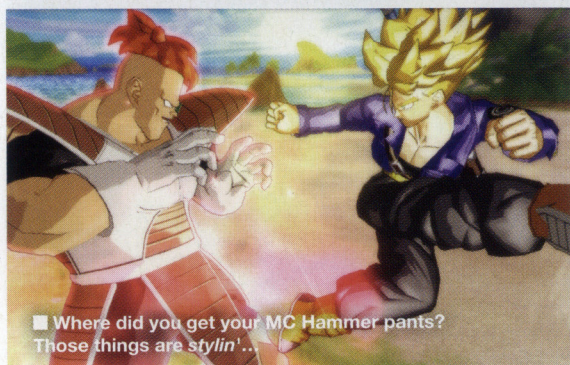
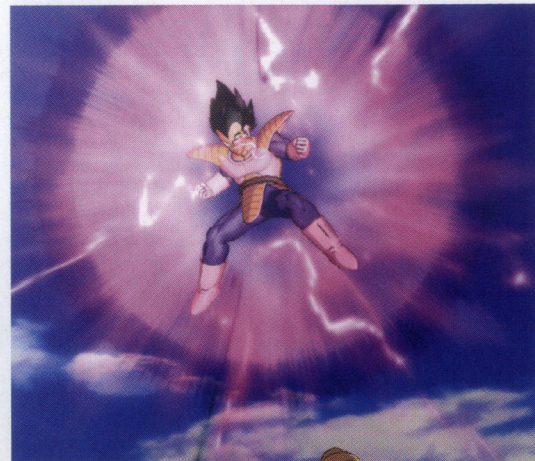
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-2
■ **PRICE:** \$99.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.atari.com

■ **BACK STORY:** Dimps have had a helluva lot of experience with many, many, many, many *Dragonball Z* titles under the belt, and it looks like they finally got the mix just right. We guess the Budokai series was good for something eh?



INFO BYTE

The menu screens have some super funky jams playing, you'll almost want to leave the menu on and boogie!



■ Where did you get your MC Hammer pants? Those things are stylin'...



DRAGONBALL Z: BURST LIMIT

Ballz? Burst Limit? Insert double entendre here...

With so many incarnations of *Dragonball Z* beat 'em up type games, you could easily get lost in the forest. Don't worry...we've got your back. If you only buy one *Dragonball Z* inspired game, this is the one to get.

Forget the fact that this is the first version for the PS3, and forget the fact that the cell-shaded characters fit to a 'T', this is about as close to re-enacting the cartoon as you're ever going to get. Scan below, and you'll find out why...

PICK A PATH

Now if you checked out the preview a few issues ago, we primarily focused on the killer versus mode where you go head to head with other characters. We were more than a little surprised at the deep combat system, and had a grand old time. That was just the tip of the iceberg as we now have a new love, the 'Chronicles' mode.

Rather than pick and play just one specific character, why not play them all. This reworked story mode separates the gameplay into various sagas that can be completed in a fairly roundabout manner. It's like picking a path to kick the most ass. Each episode is just like the cartoon, with even mid-fight breaks for characters to strike a pose and gloat about how well they're beating you to a pulp, and how your power pales in comparison to theirs. It's brilliant, and puts you right there. We half expected

to see the credits roll after we'd made Vegeta our bitch.

It gets better. You receive a grade for each fight, and depending on how well you score, a bunch of unlockables... unlock plenty of content, from ultimate finishing moves, to new partners, to playable characters – all now all at your fingertips. What's particularly cool is that once you've cracked open each saga, you can flip back and forth between battles. Not only does it keep the combat fresh and interesting, but it forces you to become more familiar with characters you might not ordinarily play, which is a bonus for any fighter, as it deepens your palate as a gamer.

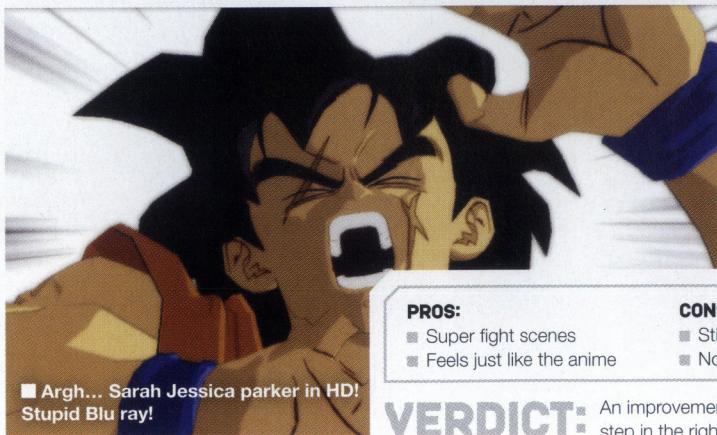
YOU KNOW WHAT WE'RE SAIYAN, MAN?

So there you have it peeps. The graphics are spot on, and though a little simplistic for the might of the PS3, it doesn't do it any disservice either. The battle modes are fun and never revert to the button mashery (though you can still win that way... the horror!).

Chronicles is where it's at, though. If you have even a passing interest in *Dragonball Z*, then you'll one hundred percent get a kick out of this. So maybe you should invest in Capsule Corp and take a hand in saving Earth from the countless evils that confront it. Aye? AYE?!? **— Dave Kozicki**

DBZ HITS THE BIG TIME!

You may or may not know that *DBZ* is getting the Hollywood makeover. Joining leads Justin Chatwin, Emmy Rossum and the smoking hot Jamie Chung (damn!) is the king of twin-pistol mayhem, Mr Chow Yun-Fat. He's taking on the role of the degenerate Master Roshi, which should be an interesting turn for him, though it's not unfamiliar territory. He also played a martial arts master in *Bulletproof Monk* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.



■ Argh... Sarah Jessica Parker in HD! Stupid Blu ray!

PROS:

- Super fight scenes
- Feels just like the anime

CONS:

- Still missing something...
- Not amazing graphically

VERDICT: An improvement on its predecessors, and a step in the right direction.

OFFICIAL
SCORE:

07

■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE
 ■ **RELEASE:** JULY 2008
 ■ **DEVELOPER:** SONY JAPAN
 ■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4
 ■ **PRICE:** \$49.95
 ■ **GAMESHARE:** AD HOC
 ■ **WEB:** echochromegame.com

■ **BACK STORY:** Whereas the handheld that shan't be named is drowning in decent puzzlers, the PSP hasn't fared quite so well, with only a handful worthy of investment. This unique, puzzler from Sony Japan aims to start tipping the scales...

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

ECHOCHROME

We're learning!

Games like *Lumines*, its sequel, *Puzzle Quest*, hell, even *Bust-A-Move* are lumped in the 'puzzle' category, yet they've all one thing in common; they're not overly challenging. Face it, you could smoke half of Nimbin and still shuffle a few coloured blocks/blobs/jewels/whatever around with enough acuity to rack a reasonable score. A puzzle is supposed to challenge; if it doesn't force you to visit those pockets of clever somewhere inside your head then it isn't doing its job.

Now, there's one thing we're certain of; nobody... and we mean *nobody* could accuse *echochrome* of being a slack-arsed moll in the make-noggin-work-now department, as given the opportunity it will happily break your brain.

The first striking thing is the look. Black and white – yep, two colours. This stark appearance, coupled with sonics that start off more epically operatic than the *Sisters of Mercy* having a dance

fight with *Muse* and *Rammstein*, before segueing into a string quartet thing worthy of an early Hitchcock film, give *echochrome* a truly unique vibe.

Each increasingly challenging level is a wireframe concoction floating in space, not too far removed from something MC Escher (no dude, he wasn't a rapper) may have doodled on dunny walls. The player must rotate the landscape so a nattily animated artist's model can trundle back and forth collecting a quota of 'echoes' – which are basically ghost dudes of you – within a time limit. This is where your grey matter gets to strut its stuff.

Forget physics – or at least what you know about it – for *echochrome* thumbs its schnoz at smartypants' like Isaac Newton by making up its own rules of perspective. If two paths seem to be touching, they are. If one platform appears to be above another – even if they're actually far apart – it is. When you can't see a gap – say by rotating a

platform to plonk a huge pole in front of it – it isn't there; the same goes for holes and launching pads – hide them and they're not there. Oh, and if your little walker dude jumps, he'll land on what looks to be below him, as long as you've tweaked the angles enough. These ain't no simple-pimple *Fight Club* rules, but they do become quite instinctive as you're absorbed further into echochromatic bliss.

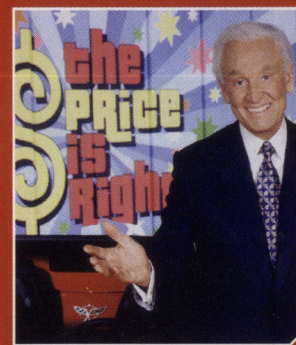
Presentation is slick, with a random mode, level selection and even a vaguely navigable level editor. The sucky bit is that any creations you lovingly assemble can only be shared via Ad-Hoc mode.

With heaps of levels – some of which are pushovers, others of which will have you borking out repeatedly until that wondrous 'D'oh!' moment of clarity – this little puppy could have you seriously straitjacketed up and ricocheting around a squishy room in no time.

But hey, it's not the destination, rather the journey that counts. **Amy Flower**

THE PRICE IS RIGHT?

OK, you can lay down 50 bucks for the fully packaged game stuffed lovingly onto a UMD, which in turn has been wedged with care into a plastic box complete with snazzy printed cover and booklet, or you can fork out a mere tenner (in US bucks, so almost the same as Aussie bucks nowadays) to download it to a Memory Stick. Why blow the extra \$40? Well, you do get another 259 levels in the packaged affair, although the standard 56 may prove enough for feeble minds...



INFO BYTE

Echochrome's sound was designed to be as soothing and unobtrusive as possible, from Hideki Sakamoto's string score through to the calming tones of *echochrome* gal and her gently intoned "oops" when you fall flailing headfirst into oblivion.

PROS:

- Unique visuals
- Hundreds of levels

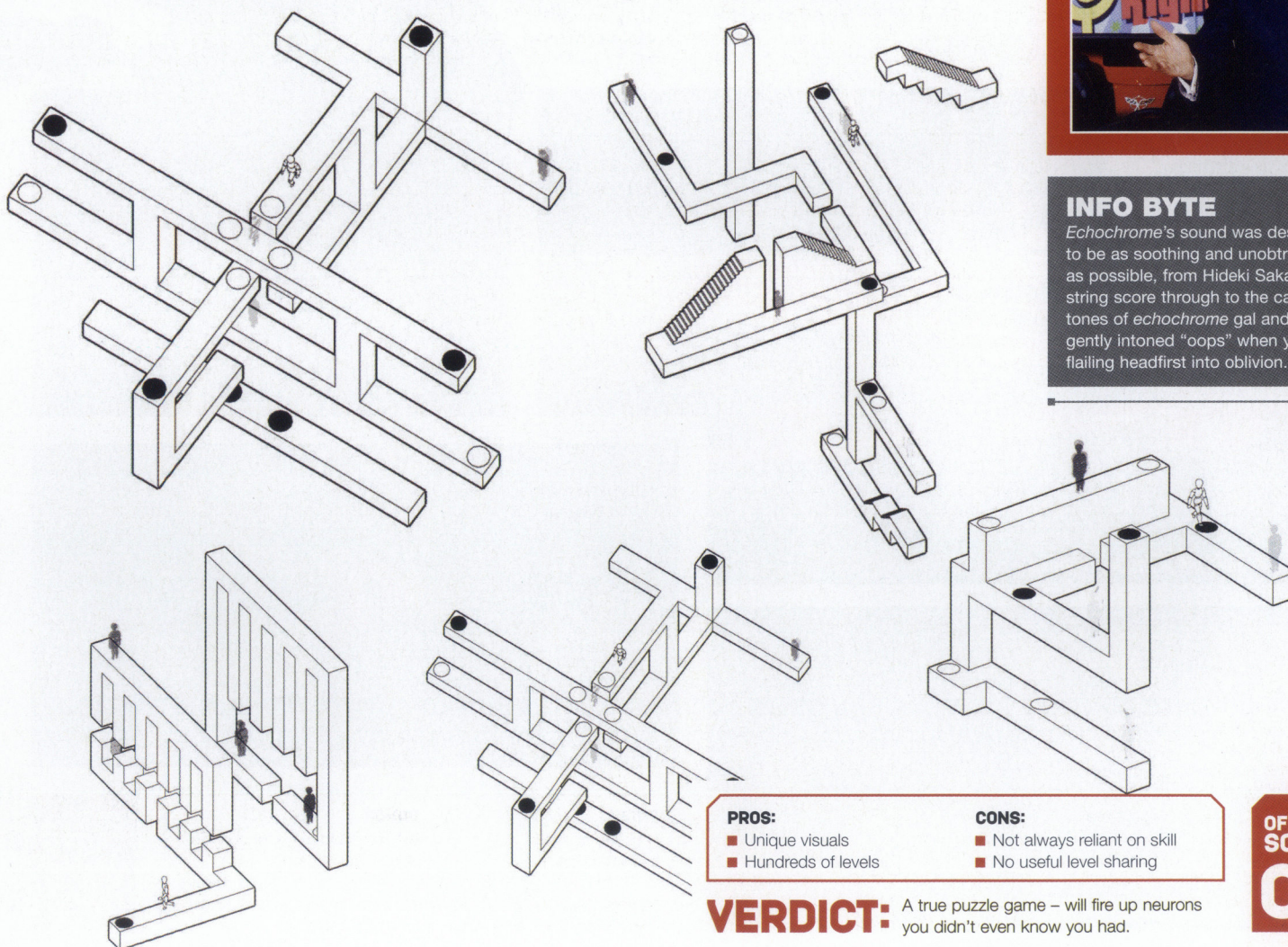
CONS:

- Not always reliant on skill
- No useful level sharing

VERDICT: A true puzzle game – will fire up neurons you didn't even know you had.

OFFICIAL
SCORE:

08



■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** HIGH IMPACT
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY

■ **PLAYERS:** 1
■ **PRICE:** \$59.95
■ **GAMESHARE:** NO
■ **WEB:** www.highimpactgames.com

■ **BACK STORY:** Everyone should have an alter ego. It lets you act like a complete tool whenever you're in the need. Set before *Ratchet and Clank Future: Tools of Destruction*, Clank has to prove Ratchet not guilty to free him from imprisonment.

SECRET AGENT CLANK

Ain't nobody clankin' around

If you had someone constantly following you around pointing out your flaws and treating you like a moron you'd be more likely to deck the dude than introduce him to the missus with a wink and a nod. That's the way most people feel about videogame sidekicks. There's a time and a place but most of the time we just want to pick up the largest, messiest gun and blast the living daylights out of those little buggers.

While Daxter proved that a smart talking ottsel can hold his own in the charisma stakes, it's unlikely that other sidekick favourites like Dogmeat, Yorda, Peter Puppy and Agro would make quite the same impact.

Clank lays somewhere in the middle, not known for his witty lines, he pulls on the tuxedo to play a smooth secret agent who steals more than a few tricks from that Bond guy. Tricked out with a bow tie featuring the ability to switch into a razor-edged boomerang, cuff links that go kaboom, a man-eating lapel and a dark

matter shooting pen, the gadgets alone make the game worth picking up.

While scooping up the bolts you can play through with stealth or just thump your way past the aggressors. Both are rewarded in equal measure.

The beauty of stealth is that you don't have to listen to the alarms going off as droids clunk towards you but you do need ample patience. Rewards in the form of bonuses will be flung your way when you dodge doggies, security systems or perform a Stealth Takedown, one of the tasks set up as a mini-game.

Aside from Clank you will have moments when you play as Ratchet, partaking in a brutal arena brawl whilst imprisoned, and surprisingly the devious Captain Qwark makes an appearance in the form of a flashback, recounting his exploits in a beyond-cheesy action sequence, which is possibly one of the most enjoyable sections in the game due to the giant exploding robot ninjas and quirky humour.

However, the game can frustrate in the way that mini-games cut into the gameplay and block progression. Stealth Takedowns aren't always necessary but picking locks, vehicle missions and rhythm action games may stand in your way if you don't have the skills.

However, if you like driving around then you can extend the experience by taking on challenges to rack up bolts.

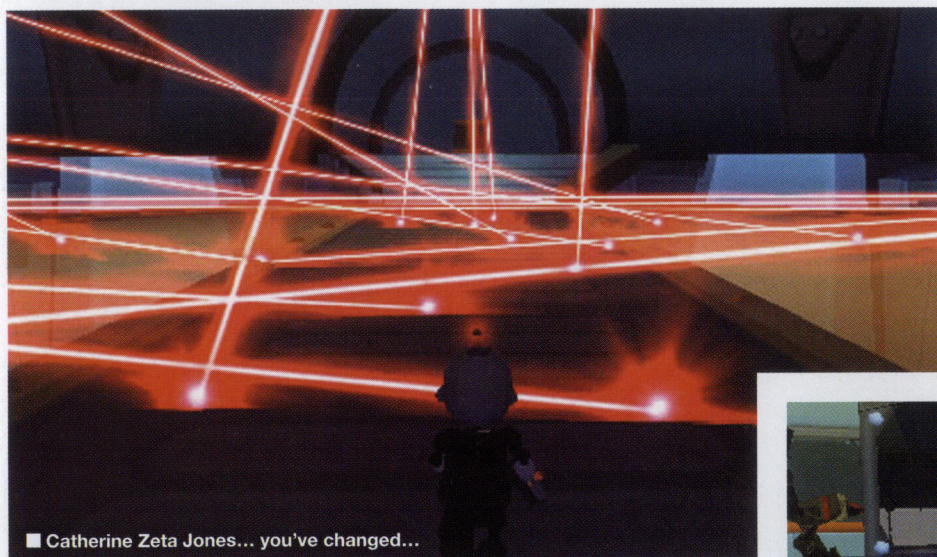
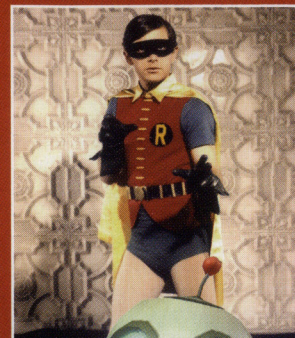
As a puzzle based game you won't be too pushed to make it through the 10 hours, although a lack of depth to the story mode and repetitive levels will put a damper on the experience.

While swinging here and there, jumping and crashing your way to the final big boss man you'll probably utter some expletives here and there – but then jump straight back into the game to replay through the unlocked extras.

— Vanessa Morgan

SIDEKICKS

They may only be around to pick up the slack and act as a sounding board for the heroes but the term sidekick originally comes from pickpocket slang. The 'kick' is the front side pocket of pants and was hardest to steal from, thus the sidekick is something/someone that hangs around the hero's pockets and is hard to shake. The mind boggles!



PROS:

- Clever gadgets
- Captain Qwark

CONS:

- Camera to close for comfort
- Repetitiveness

VERDICT: A solid bit of adventuring that will puzzle you, but not inspire you.

OFFICIAL
SCORE:

07

■ **GENRE:** RACING
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** CLIMAX
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4
■ **PRICE:** \$59.95
■ **GAMESHARE:** YES
■ **WEB:** www.us.playstation.com

■ **BACK STORY:** The *ATV Offroad Fury* series started back in 2001 and *ATV Offroad Fury Pro* is the second PSP title in the series. Offering races on jump-filled tracks, wooing the crowd with air-based tricks is a big part of the racing experience.

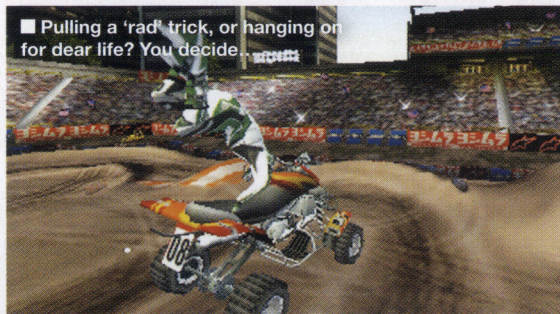
PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

INFO BYTE

It's not just about racing. There's real ATV love to be found in *ATVOFP* too. As well as a bunch of trading cards to buy and collect, you can take photos from the pause screen during a race and then pan, zoom and crop away to nab the perfect extreme-action shot.



■ Why do they have a spare tyre – it's a race for God's sake



■ Pulling a 'rad' trick, or hanging on for dear life? You decide...



■ "Guys! Guys! I thought today was yellow day!" "No idiot today is blue day!"



ATV OFFROAD FURY PRO

Ready to ride?

What the hell are you doing Sony? During the pre-release marketing of the PSP, you showed us screenshots of *Gran Turismo* sitting on the screen of the device. You even gave it a name: *Gran Turismo Mobile*. And we became giddy. Really giddy.

It's now three years later and *Gran Turismo Mobile* seems to have disappeared off the radar completely. We realise that creator Kazunori Yamauchi and his *Gran Turismo* series has bigger, 1080p-fish to fry, but c'mon. Give us some portable GT love.

Instead, you bring us this: an off-beat extreme racing game which was released Stateside in 2006. Nice one.

What you've got with *ATV Offroad Fury Pro* is a straight-up racing game featuring off-road vehicles on some seriously undulating dirt tracks. While the quad bike is the star of the show, you've also got motorbikes, buggies and even trucks to race here. A particularly nice touch is that each has distinct handling so if you're looking for a different challenge on the courses, you've got choices.

And the basics are pretty much up to scratch – you can customise the look of your wheels as well as that of your rider, upgrade the guts of your vehicles and even sign with different sponsors to get different types of gear to play with and earn more credits to spend on all the upgrades and customisation options.

Sponsorship is actually a key part



■ "Double O, Noooooo!"

of the *ATVOFP* experience, even if it does feel a little bit light and peripheral. See, without it, this racer is as straight-up as they come: single races, championship progression and multiplayer bouts form the basis of this game. Sponsorship mixes things up by offering basic objectives to think about as you race: some want tricks galore, so you'll need to top the points table based by performing tricks while you've got air (race position be damned!), while others reward bonuses based on position – they'll even penalise you if you finish too far down the rank. You can choose your sponsors too (up to three), so for the ultimate challenge go for a combo which wants ranking and style.

As for the racing itself, *ATVOFP* is a racer that passes muster – but only just. While it's fun enough there's nothing exceptional here and more than a few things that annoy. Besides the overall

lack-lustre graphics (be gentle – this game is almost two years old), course detail is fairly non-descript making for moments where you're not quite sure which way the track goes. The three opponents you race crash into you far too often when you've got air, and the trick system feels clunky and is rather unforgiving, encouraging that you avoid it altogether.

There's enough to like in *ATVOFP*, just be aware that none of it on its own is particularly compelling. Now, Sony, how about that *Gran Turismo Mobile* then?

— March Stepnik

PROS:

■ Nice career progression, plenty of accessories.

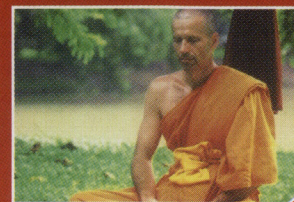
CONS:

■ Racing and trickengine never leaves second gear.

VERDICT: *ATVOFP* does a half-decent job of quad-bike racing on the go.

SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

Got a copy of *ATV Offroad Fury 4* then? If you do, then you've got access to some extra goodies. If you hook up your copy of *ATVOFP* on the PSP to *ATVOF4* on the PS2, you'll be able to transfer custom tracks, cars, trading cards and other goodies between the two. And speaking of custom tracks, *ATVOFP* doesn't feature the most powerful track-editor ever seen in a racing game, but there's enough there to bring in some fresh thrills if you've worn out every other aspect of the game.



OFFICIAL
SCORE:

06

PRESS PLAY!

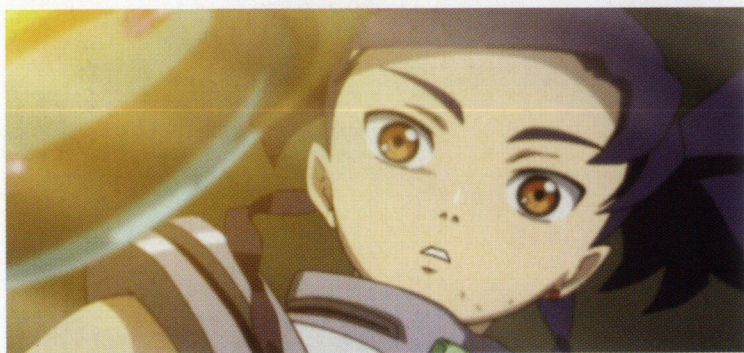
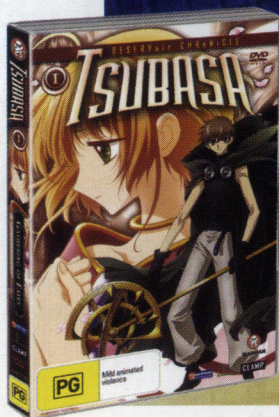
Dive into our hand picked anime selection from Madman Entertainment with all the new titles set to twist your mind!

Tsubasa Chronicles

Welcome to the land of Clow...

The fates shine upon young archeologist Syaoran and his life-long love, the Princess Sakura. As the moon hovers silently above the kingdom, a beautiful and otherworldly sound fills the air, drawing the princess to the ancient ruins. Her latent powers stir, awakening an ability to cross dimensions – but the process is interrupted as unseen forces conspire to claim this magic as their own.

Sakura's soul is sent adrift across the universe, each memory a feather dancing through the stars. Syaoran will make heroic sacrifices to track down the remnants of her soul. With fellow travelers Kurogane and Fai, a warrior and a wizard, the epic quest begins.



My-Otome

The My-HiME spin-off.

They possess the powers of a lost era, serving as the peacekeepers and protectors of the numerous kingdoms on the planet Earl; they are the Otome. And for Arika Yumemiya, the dream of becoming a Meister Otome has brought her through the desert to the Windbloom Kingdom where she hopes to train at the prestigious Garderobe Academy.

However gaining admittance the Academy won't be as easy as she thinks it is. Not only will she find herself rescuing the soon to be Queen of the Kingdom, fending off a giant mechanized warrior, and

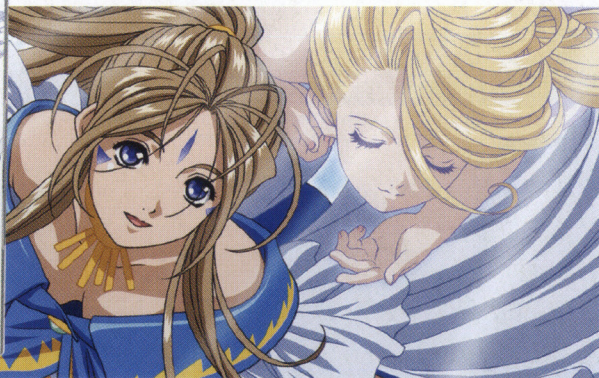
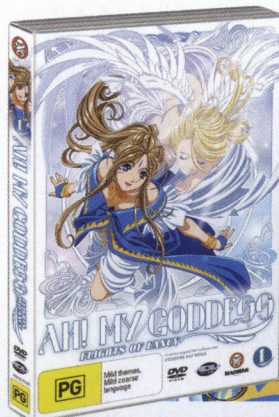
discovering her latent powers as an Otome, she'll also have to win a battle against an established Otome in order to be admitted. And even if she makes it in, how the hell is she going to pay those exorbitant school fees? Find out by checking out this episode now!



Ah! My Goddess Flights of Fancy Everyone Has Wings!

Keiichi Morisato is an engineering student, top driver of his campus motor club, and not very lucky with the ladies. But while calling for take-out food one evening, a wrong number puts him in contact with the "Goddess Hotline." One misplaced wish later, Keiichi finds himself blessed with Belldandy, the perfect girlfriend and a goddess in every sense of the word.

Unfortunately, she doesn't have any idea of how to act in the human world, and her presence quickly gets Keiichi kicked out of the dorms. Unfortunately for Keiichi, his troubles have just begun!



Eureka Seven Psalms of Planets...

For Renton, every day's the same – nothing happens, nothing changes. He goes to school, he goes home, it seems like the only thing that keeps him happy is lifting on his ref board. Nothing exciting ever happens to him.

Until one day, a giant mecha comes crashing into his life – literally. And inside is the most beautiful girl he has ever seen in his entire life! The only problem is – that the girl is on the run from the military with her stolen mecha. In other words, she's brought trouble with her.

Renton will have to summon up all his courage to face his childhood hero; get the girl he's so hopelessly smitten with to like him; and – oh yeah – live up to the impossible legacy of his father who saved the world from destruction! But hey, at least it's not boring anymore.



FILM

Scared, cut up and left for dead, who says you can't have a great night in without popping in a game!? We delve into *Nip/Tuck*, *The Promise*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Kaidan* and much more!



DVD OF THE MONTH

JUNO (MA)

■ **STARRING:** Ellen Page, Jason Bateman, Michael Cera, Jennifer Garner
■ **DIRECTOR:** Jason Reitman

Pro-life/pro-choice, whatever your stance it

makes for some pretty dark comedy and hilarious drama when *Juno* gets knocked up to one of the dorkiest looking heartthrobs around, Paulie Bleeker (Michael Cera).

It's pretty obvious that no-one really backed this film as being a big hit except those working on it. Made for only \$6.5 million, an amount some actors get for waking up and taking a piss on set, it's made 35 times the initial investment for Fox. Now coming to DVD and Blu-Ray

it'll be racking up more dough as it comes over loaded with featurettes, outtakes and deleted screens.

If you were busy hiding under your controller a couple months back then the story goes: Girl throws up realises she's pregnant from the first time with a non-boyfriend boyfriend, decides she can't get rid of it with a prod from an activist friend, tells the oddly accepting parents and then hunts down someone to adopt the growing bump.

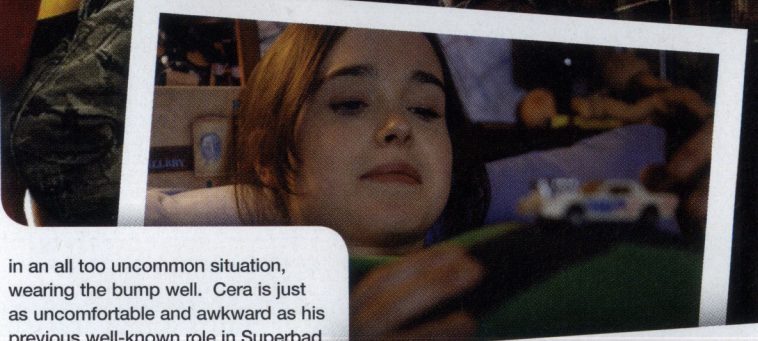
While the script is decent the strength of the film comes from the acting, with Ellen Page, a teenager

in an all too uncommon situation, wearing the bump well. Cera is just as uncomfortable and awkward as his previous well-known role in *Superbad* with the rest of the 'adult' roles filed by strong character actors.

Not always laugh out loud funny you'll definitely find a soft spot for this hard luck comedy.

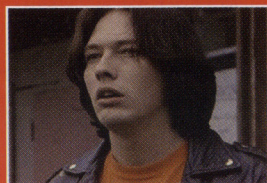
VERDICT: Sit back and relax, stop taking things too seriously and you'll find yourself entertained with quick, quirky lines from this dark dramedy!

★★★★



THE DRAMEDY...

The clash of comedy and drama is all about the quirky characters.



NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Ed Chigliak
Cicely, Alaska home of Ruth-Ann's general store and that wandering moose! Ed utins for learning everything he knows of the outside world from Fellini films.



ED

Ed Stevens
A 20-year obsession with Carol, or the fact that a lawyer in a bowling alley had clients? Ed had a rubber face that twisted to form various uncomfortable expressions.



BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

Spike/ Harmony/Xander
Oh, hell the whole crew is a messed up katamari of quirks taken from some random crevice of Joss Whedon's body.



BOSTON LEGAL

Denny Crane
William Shatner, the man, the legend. Denny Crane is one messed up fucker. Combining the two is like sucking back a beer in the sunday sun, just so sweet.



SIX FEET UNDER

Ruth Fisher
She started off as such a nice old lady, the kind that bakes your friends cookies but don't forget this woman sleeps each night with dead people under her roof.

HORROR

KAIDAN (M)

■ **STARRING:** Kumiiko Aso, Takaaki Enoki, Reona Hirota
■ **DIRECTOR:** Hideo Nakata



When you want car chases watch the Americans, for martial arts it's Hong Kong but if you're looking to be left with a little wee puddle around you due to the fear reverberating through

your body then the Japanese will provide you with the experience. Hideo Nakata, the man behind *The Ring* and *Dark Water*, takes you into a traditional horror set 250 years in the past. With a developing love not dissimilar to the Montague/Capulet affair, a cursed family and the family that created their pain, produce children who meet. Cursed Shinkichi strikes out at his lover and is forced to fight against ending up in the watery grave of lake Kasane-ga-fuchi.

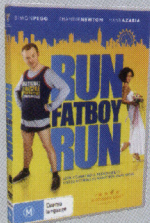
■ **VERDICT:** This old school horror is beautifully shot and well acted but not nearly as haunting as *The Ring*.

★★★

COMEDY

RUN FATBOY RUN (M)

■ **STARRING:** Simon Pegg, Thandie Newton, Hank Azaria, Dylan Moran
■ **DIRECTOR:** David Schwimmer



If you've been sitting around for the past five years doing nothing but sucking back beers and lamenting about what could have been then getting off the couch is an

advisable first step. However, when you've ditched your pregnant fiancé at the altar, running the London Marathon to prove you're a changed man is a heart attack waiting in the wings. Dennis' (Simon Pegg) wakes up to realise he made a mistake. The love of his life Libby meets Whit who seems to have everything going for him. Overwhelmed by over achieving Whit, Dennis announces he'll run the London Marathon to chase back Libby's love.

■ **VERDICT:** Funny due to the cast it's definitely a step backwards from *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*.

★★★

ACTION

THE PROMISE (M)

■ **STARRING:** Hiroyuki Sanada, Jang Dong Gun, Cecelia Cheung, Nicholas Tse
■ **DIRECTOR:** Kaige Chen



The Chinese decided to throw \$37 million on this epic film, their largest budget ever. They pulled out the big swords, produced an epic tale of two powerful

warlords and threw in all kinds of martial artist tomfoolery but they forgot something, consistency. A nice mix of swirling cinematography and head spinning kicks takes you through the story of a princess and her three suitors – a duke, a slave and a military man. There is battle after battle and a destiny in there somewhere, but while it's about love, you'll be too distracted by the epicness of scenes. Amongst it all is a beautiful character driven story.

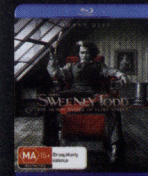
■ **VERDICT:** Sometimes feeling more like a stage adaptation than a feature film, with clunky special effects, though it is still worth a watch.

★★★

SWEENEY TODD

(MA15+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Tim Burton
■ **STARRING:** Johnny Depp



Sent to a backwater country like OZ for a crime he didn't commit, Benjamin Barker returns with knife in hand under the name Sweeney

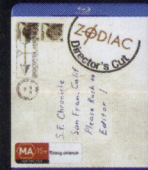
Todd. He takes to those around him and serves them up to the people around him.

■ **VERDICT:** Revenge is sweetest served with a twisted smile.

★★★★★

ZODIAC (MA15+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** David Fincher
■ **STARRING:** Jake Gyllenhaal



The Zodiac killer kept a city on edge during the late 1960s, taunting the press and police with a series of letters. A cartoonist

and crime reporter join together to decode the clues.

■ **VERDICT:** Gripping puzzler of a thriller.

★★★★★

SO I MARRIED AN AXE MURDERER

(M15+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Thomas Schlamme
■ **STARRING:** Mike Myers



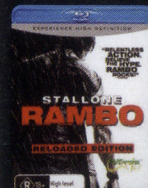
More a cult classic than a roll around on the floor comedy, Charlie McKenzie has a fear of marriage. Then he meets Harriet!

■ **VERDICT:** Myers is all over it.

★★★

RAMBO: RELOADED EDITION (R18+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Sylvester Stallone
■ **STARRING:** Sylvester Stallone



"Back to what? My friends died here, let me die here" kind of how we feel about Rambo. Sadly his seclusion was interrupted...

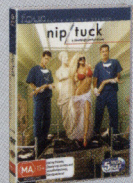
■ **VERDICT:** Should have stayed retired!

★★

TV

NIP/TUCK: THE COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Dylan Walsh and Julian McMahon
■ **CREATOR:** Ryan Murphy



Five discs of sex, sex, some sucking... of fat and then a nip back to the bedroom. Oddly *Nip/Tuck* didn't draw the audiences that it continues to draw in the US of A, but with a sleazy Aussie in the lead it's worth a look on DVD. The South Beach practice is worth dropping into just to check on this season's guest stars with everyone from Alanis Morissette and Rosie O'Donnell to Brooke Shields needing some work. The storylines are a tad uncomfortable with organ-harvesting rings and a ventriloquist who wants to look like his dummy breaking up the seduction scenes.

■ **VERDICT:** Whether it's money or beauty that motivates people it's all a good laugh.

★★★

COMEDY

TIM AND ERIC AWESOME SHOW, GREAT JOB! SEASON 1 (M)

■ **STARRING:** Tim Heidecker, Eric Wareheim, Bob Odenkirk
■ **DIRECTOR:** Various



It seems that the only way you can adequately poke fun at TV is through the medium itself and while many American shows get it wrong, these guys are all about

humiliation. Prank calls in the style of *Crank Yankers*, some singing, maybe inspiration to the *Flight of the Concord* boys, although not as skillfully executed and education on the proper use of a toilet. It's all in bad taste with a low-grade look that you'd expect from a 'personal' tape that you've nicked from next doors garbage bin. We really want to see a B'ougar!

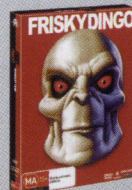
■ **VERDICT:** Not for everyone but those keen on uncomfortable silences and men in tight shorts track it down.

★★★

COMEDY

FRISKY DINGO: SEASON 1 (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Stuart Culpepper, Christian Danley, Adam Reed, Eric Sims
■ **CREATOR:** Adam Reed, Matt Thompson



Superhero parodies – there have been the good (Harvey Birdman) and there have been some shockers (just about everything else).

Then comes Xander Crew a billionaire playboy who throws on a cape to become Awesome X. Oh, such a nifty disguise! The problem for the tight wearing wonder is that he got rid of all the supervillains in the city and really should be working for a living running his big corporation. Enter stage left, Killface. He's looking to destroy humanity using Annihilatrix. This show isn't simply weird. It'll make you think your brain is leaking spinal fluid and you're hallucinating. It should also make you laugh out loud.

■ **VERDICT:** If you like it deadpan then get it here! It's definitely a unique look at the life of a superhero.

★★★★★

SIMON PEGG IS A HUGE STAR WARS FAN WITH MOST OF HIS FILMS REFERENCING THE SAGA. IN ADDITION TO THE REPEATED VISUAL REFERNCES IN *SHAUN OF THE DEAD* HIS FLATMATE PETE, ACTOR PETER SERAFINOWICZ IS THE VOICE OF DARTH MAUL.



■ "Jack? Jack is dead, my friend"

CINEMA

THE DARK KNIGHT

(MA15+)

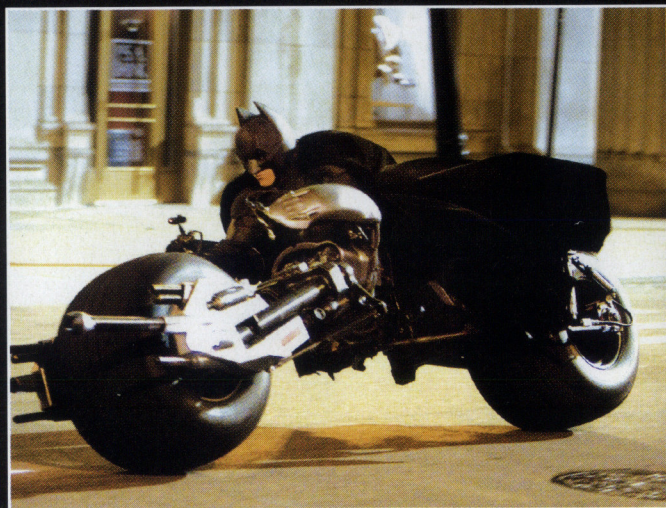
■ **DIRECTOR:** Christopher Nolan

■ **STARRING:** Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Heath Ledger, Gary Oldman

Ridding the streets of crime seems all too easy till a painted up freak in the form of the Joker appears on the streets of Gotham. Pulling everything out of his new and improved technology arsenal, including the Batpod, he must face the mad man and himself as he "confronts everything he believes".

With newly appointed district attorney Harvey Dent getting in his way in more ways than one, Bruce Wayne falls into a love triangle with the striking and feisty Rachel Dawes.

The one superhero film that seems to have the cast just right, *The Dark Knight* is not one for the kids. It's twisted and explosive and bound to leave everyone lamenting the loss of Heath Ledger once again.



COMING SOON

STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS (PG)

■ **Starring:** Samuel L. Jackson

Filling the gap between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*, a clone war rages between the Confederacy of Independent Systems and the Galactic Republic. The hunt is on to find Jabba's son and who is controlling the renegades. August 14

ZOMBIE STRIPPERS (MA15+)

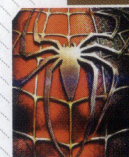
■ **Starring:** Jenna Jameson
Media sensation Jenna and Freddy Krueger himself, Robert Englund join forces to take on a secret government agency. A chemical virus is let loose and the first to feel the effects are strippers. August 14

HAROLD & KUMAR ESCAPE FROM GUANTANAMO BAY (MA15+)

■ **Starring:** John Cho and Kal Penn
Harold and Kumar rush off to Amsterdam to pursue a chick and find themselves in all kinds of trouble. Homeland Security sent them off to Guantanamo Bay. September 4

BUZZ

The latest movie murmurs from home and abroad



HOLD THIS DATE

Well, hold the month for the moment because we aren't privileged enough to have the exact date that you'll need to start lining up just yet. *Spider-man 4* is due for release in May, 2011 and while many things could happen in that time period we're willing to predict they'll stick to that date. You might want to keep in mind though that there is no script, no one has signed on to star or direct the film, so there is no guarantee of Spidey goodness.



G.I. WOAH!

Looks like we're not going to have a real 'international hero' in 2009 when *G.I. Joe: Rise of the Cobra* being is released in cinemas on August 9. No the studio decided the rest of the world wasn't worth saving and opted for 'a real American Hero' instead. While we did raise an eyebrow at selection of Encino Man Brendan Fraser as Gung Ho, the rest of the cast doesn't look to shabby with Channing Tatum lining up to play Duke and Sienna Miller throwing on fake breasts to play The Baroness.



ARNIE LOVE

That chunk of a man may be nothing more than the governor of California these days but rumours are spreading that he's in discussions to come out of retirement to work with Sly Stallone. Now if this news isn't big enough, it's to shake his bon-bons in a Bollywood film. What the? The feature known as *Incredible Love* is the tale of a stuntman who becomes a hit in Hollywood but can't find love. Awwwwwww! Not playing the lead, both roles are likely to be cameos!



WE BELIEVE!

While the plot line continues to be a closely guarded secret, stills from *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* are slowly sneaking out. Yes, they will spend time climbing around the snow and yes, Mulder will be very, very cold and even more angry. The only other details that are currently available are the cast. Billy Connolly, Xzibit and Amanda Peet will all appear in the film. With only a few weeks till release we look forward to believing again.

Win a 42" Pioneer Plasma valued at \$3,499

Something's happening to Dan... It's confusing, it's awkward, it's family!

Steve Carell stars as Dan, a widower who falls for a woman he meets in a bookstore only to find out that she is his brother's new girlfriend, in this witty and off beat romantic comedy.

To celebrate the release of *Dan in Real Life*, which is available to rent or buy from June 25, BLOCKBUSTER®, Icon Film and Pioneer are giving you the chance to win a 42" Pioneer High Definition Kuro Plasma PDP428XDA valued at \$3,499!



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INTERACTION

Codes, hints, tips, unlockables and more!

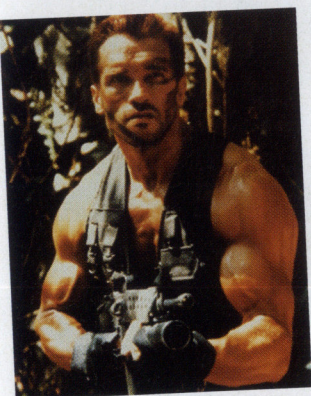
TIPS & CHEATS

GTA IV CHEATS

The old saying goes "cheaters never prosper". Usually they're right, especially with videogames, as it often cheapens the experience, but in the case of *GTA IV*, well, we beg to differ. In the mean streets of Liberty City, we won't hold it against you if you cheat a little. In fact, we think we might as well join you, so here's our top five handy hints to maximise your fun (read carnage) and ensure you have a blast, and everyone around you gets blasted.

GUNS...LOTS AND LOTS OF GUNS

Wanna get straight to it but don't want to mess around doing missions, talking to Roman or capping bystanders for cash just so you can barely afford a measly little peashooter? Enter 486-555-0100 into your mobile and sha-pow! Cue the Commando montage and you've now got a Baseball Bat, Handgun, Shotgun, MP5, M4, Sniper Rifle, RPG and Grenades. Not hardcore enough for you? Dial 486-555-0150 for a Knife, Molotovs, Handgun, Shotgun, Uzi, AK47, Sniper Rifle and RPG. Then grab a vehicle and run around town causing as much havoc as you can. You owe it to yourself, don't you?



■ It's amazing what you can do with a magnifying glass these days...

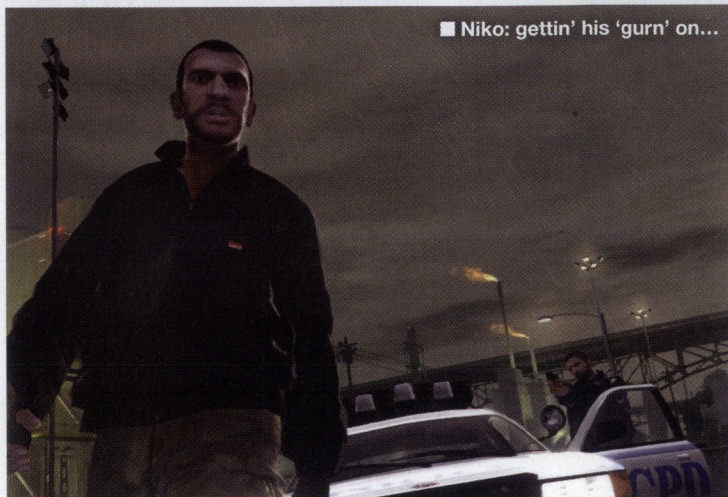


■ (Insert Arnie 'choppa' caption here)



WANTED... DEAD OR ALIVE

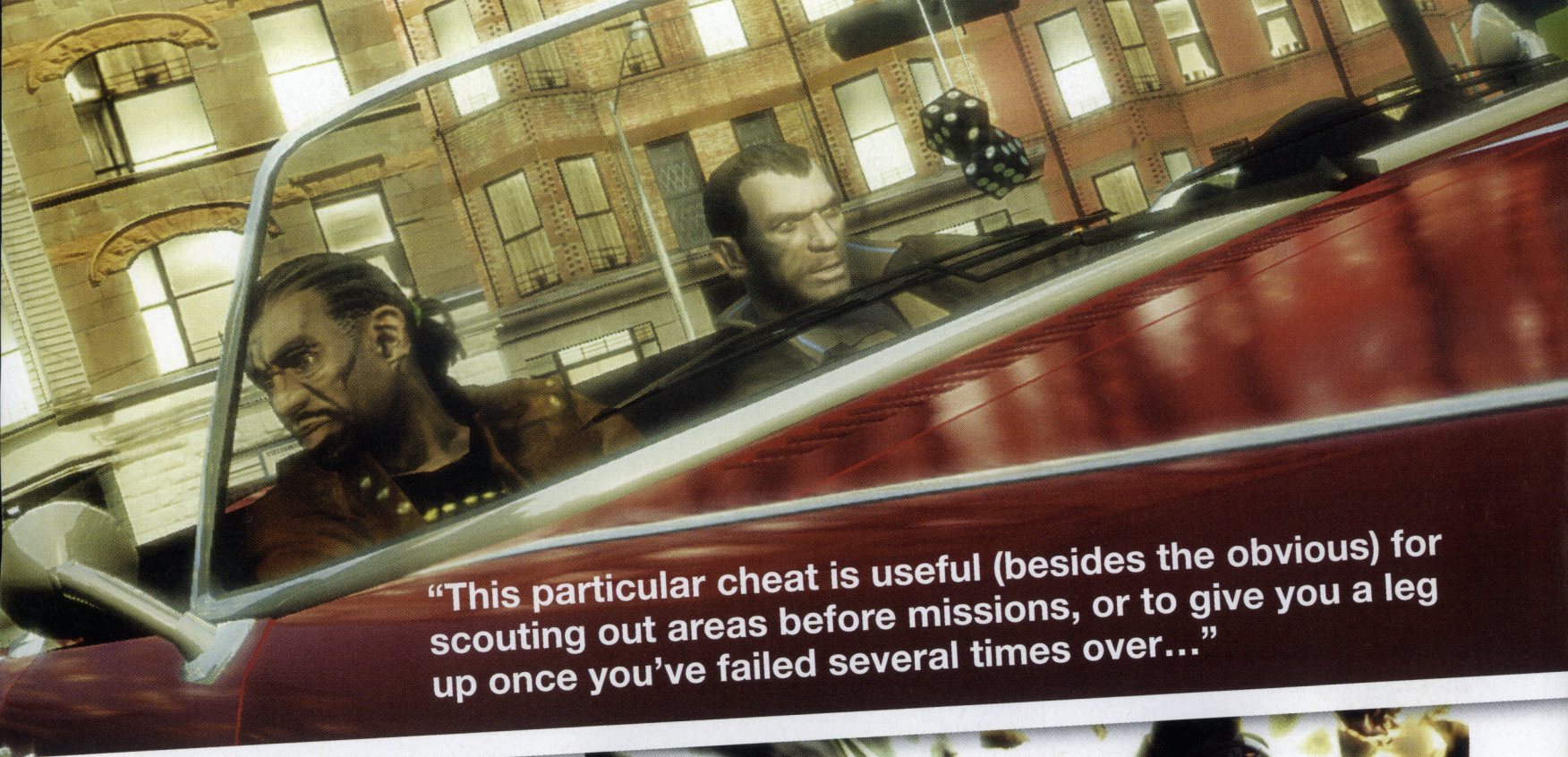
Want an all-time classic cheat that never gets old? This little beauty can be used on its lonesome or in conjunction with any other. It's the old increase/decrease the Wanted Level bizzo. To remove your Wanted Level dial 267-555-0100 and to bring it back up dial 267-555-0150. We can't even begin to describe how cool this is. Run around the streets filleting and fricasseeing anything that moves, jump in a car, burnout and peel away, then just when the cops think they've got you...BAM! The stars disappear and they are left standing around looking stupid...



■ Niko: gettin' his 'gurn' on...

MAKE IT FAST... AND SEXY

Maybe you want to travel by less than conventional means? Take to the seas by calling WET-555-0100 to spawn a Jetmax boat, kinda like the one they rocked in *Miami Vice*. The ocean makes you queasy you say? How about some aerial antics? Get to da choppa! To spawn a Police Chopper dial up FLY-555-0100, or if you want a little more bang for your buck, you can spawn a heavily armoured Annihilator 359-555-0100 (similar to an Apache attack chopper). These cheats give you a whole new dimension to attacking missions, especially when you control the skies. Why walk or drive when you can fly down, axe a few dudes from the air, then land on a rooftop and sniper away until you've had your fill?



"This particular cheat is useful (besides the obvious) for scouting out areas before missions, or to give you a leg up once you've failed several times over..."

YOU'VE GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN YOUR HANDS...

Since this latest incarnation of GTA is a little tougher and rawer, it never hurts to know where everything is. Knowledge is power after all. Sure you can run around willy-nilly finding secrets, armour, health and weapons on the fly, but why bother if you don't have to? Get your ass to any computer in game and type in the URL www.whatt heydonotwantyouoknow.com and bingo! The whole world is then your oyster. This particular cheat is useful (besides the obvious) for scouting out areas before missions, or to give you a leg up once you've failed several times over.



■ Niko often set his bombs to explode the minute he started break dancing. He called it the 'bomb diggy'



■ "You idiot! I *told* you I was wearing a green shirt tomorrow! Why did you put yours on as well?" "I just wanted to be part of the gang is all..."



F..B...AIIIIIGHT!

Now that you've got the hang of weaponry and running and gunning from the law, why not take the piss? As with all GTAs the law enforcement vehicles are the shiz-nit. Previous models like the SWAT truck are a little too bulky for our tastes, and sure a tank causes maximum property damage but it ain't got no style homie. For the slickest of sleek dial 227-555-0100 to get a FIB Buffalo. This magnificent piece of engineering excellence is super quick, corners on a dime and is particularly fun in conjunction with the wanted level cheats. If you're looking for a ride, you may as well do it in style.

DATABASE

All the games that matter on PS3!

FUTURE WATCH

The PS3 games to grab in the coming months

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Release: TBA

Run on the *Assassin's Creed* engine, the new *Prince of Persia* will have a unique 'illustrative' look that already has fans talking. Desperate to get our hands on the game for some extended gameplay, the Prince is said to be able to defy gravity with his new partner, a girl known only as Elika.

PURE

Release: Late 2008

We can't count the amount of times that we've heard that the next iteration of a racing game series will be the most EXTREME ride ever but we're more likely to believe the hype with *Pure*. The jumps are almost as jaw dropping as the wipe outs, which promises a good mix of ooohs and aaahs from anyone that gets their hands on this quad racing gem.

GHOSTBUSTERS

Release: Late 2008

WE GOT ONE! While we haven't seen any of the game itself as of yet, reuniting the original cast after more than 20 years is nothing short of absolutely ectoplasmic. Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis return to sculpt new supernatural terrors ready to once again plague New York City. We've picked up the phone and are ready to call! Ghostbusters baby!

SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING

Release: TBA 2008

The mist covered streets of *Silent Hill* make their way to next gen for the first time as Alex Shepherd returns from his tour of duty on compassionate leave due to his younger brother mysterious disappearance. The screens alone have us twitching with anticipation of emaciated dogs chewing on our bits and blood covered hammer head creatures charging us as we try to fight our way free. Of particular interest are shots of Alex knee deep in water because that's a whole load of messed up right there. Bye, bye toes!

PS3 TOP 20

- 1 METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS**
Arguably the best PS3 game to date - an undisputed masterpiece. A legendary game with a legendary hero.
- 2 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
The scope and scale of *GTAIV* is beyond anything gaming has ever had to offer. No game has come close to creating a world anything like Liberty City.
- 3 ASSASSIN'S CREED**
A landmark in gaming history. Nothing short of awe-inspiring. The missions are samey, but navigating open-worlds will never be the same. The biggest leap since *GTAIII*.
- 4 UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE**
The best PlayStation exclusive on the market and the best looking console game to date. Frankly, *Uncharted* rocks up to the party and just plain owns everything...
- 5 CALL OF DUTY 4**
Relentlessly exciting. Includes a dizzying variety of combat scenarios and stacks of bleeding-edge military hardware. You'd have to be insane, or a girly-man, to miss it.
- 6 ROCK BAND**
The best party game ever and a triumph in every department, with a killer set list and rad instruments. You wanted the best; you got the best - *Rock Band* rocks.
- 7 MOTORSTORM**
Fast, hard, dirty and utterly exhilarating. *MotorStorm* is essential for everyone's PS3. Not even the lack of split-screen can detract from this fantastic racer.
- 8 RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN**
The perfect launch title for PS3, and possibly the best console FPS ever made. The massive 40-player online deathmatches are more fun than you can imagine.
- 9 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
One of the deepest adventures we've ever laid eyes on. Simply put - awesome. This is arguably the only RPG you'll need for some time to come.
- 10 SKATE**
A groundbreaking title that resets the bar for sports games in general. It kickflips *Tony Hawk's* to the curb with its simple approach. Irresistibly addictive and downright essential.
- 11 WARHAWK**
There is no better multiplayer game on PS3 right now. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night and smoother than a glass of Guinness, it's a superior piece of software.
- 12 BURNOUT PARADISE**
Despite the lack of the old Crash Mode, the overwhelming majority of *Burnout Paradise* rocks harder than Slash during an epic guitar solo. So fast, so wild.
- 13 HEAVENLY SWORD**
Heavenly Sword is one of the best games we've seen in ages. A beautiful, yet deep, masterpiece and an awesomely enjoyable ride, albeit a rather short one.
- 14 GUITAR HERO III**
Captures everything perfect about *Guitar Hero* with the best tracklist yet, but very nearly spoiled it all with the ridiculous new Battle Mode.
- 15 COLIN MCRAE DIRT**
Colin McRae DIRT is an ambitious, accessible racer with a surprising amount of depth. The best rally sim ever? You better believe it. Rest in peace big guy.
- 16 THE DARKNESS**
Tentacles and guns - the perfect combination. Stunning, original and gory as hell. You'd have to be dim to miss *The Darkness*.
- 17 STUNTMAN: IGNITION**
The vehicular equivalent of a 10-hour-long orgasm. Gentlemen, start your boners. *Stuntman: Ignition* succeeds in upending the original in every way.
- 18 RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION**
The biggest, wildest, most interesting, varied and downright gool o' fashioned fun adventure these two have been part of.
- 19 THE ORANGE BOX**
A stellar package; ripe, in season and packed full of vitamin value. If there isn't one title here that does it for you your gaming license is null and void.
- 20 RACE DRIVER: GRID**
No V8s and no Australian tracks and it still rates up there with the best of 'em for the suped up cars, intensity and speeeeeeet! A very pretty package!

PS3

5 VIDEOGAME SOUNDTRACKS!

ARMORED CORE 4 7

A far better alternative to *Mobile Suit Gundam*.

BEOWULF 6

Has the dubious honour of ticking every game cliché.

BLADESTORM: THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR 6

A solid mix of genres wrapped in an intriguing tale.

BLAZING ANGELS II: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII 6

Not quite the ace of aces at this stage.

CALL OF DUTY 3 7

A solid but surprisingly unspectacular shooter.

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO 6

Sick and twisted but not enough variety.

THE CLUB 8

Compulsive and fun – one club you should join.

CONAN 7

A bulldog of bloodletting, savage adventure and boobies.

DEVIL MAY CRY 4 7

A worthy entry into the series but the backtracking spoils it.

DEF JAM: ICON 8

Somehow it's won its way into our hearts. Stupid fun.

THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT 5

Impressive tech, but it's still a \$160 card game.

F.E.A.R. 8

A chilling ride but the graphics are a bit of a shocker.

FIFA 08 8

Finally puts *FIFA* on level terms with *Pro Evolution*.

FIFA STREET 3 7

The saviour for your multiplayer soul. Simple but fun.

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 8

Boasts visuals that will knock the teeth out of you.

FOLKLORE 8

Great graphics, memorable characters. A sweet surprise.

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES 7

Brimms with potential but fails to live up to it.

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE 5

Plodding gameplay that belongs on the Atari 2600.

THE GODFATHER: THE DON'S EDITION 6

Fine, but do yourself a favour and get the PS2 version.

THE GOLDEN COMPASS 4

Uninspired level design and dull quests make this a chore.

HARRY POTTER & THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX 6

Decent, but its chore-like structure will bore most.

JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS 7

A top bit of racing fluff, although it's all a tad generic.

KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN 6

One part *Hitman*, one part Michael Mann; mostly a let down.

LAIR 5

A massive let-down. It feels rushed and unfinished.

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION 6

Solid enough, but a lazy port and a visual let-down.



Final Fantasy VII

Known for the epic hair and narrative, Nobuo Uematsu constructed a soundtrack that will bring a tear to the most battle weary.



Silent Hill 3

Scream. Creak. Scream. Repeat! You'd expect horror to be nothing but noise but the *SH* theme will be with you down every empty street.



GTA: Vice City

Throw on the flouro 'cos the eighties are back and busting a move. From *Toto's 'Africa'* to Cutting Crew with '(I just) died in your arms'. Classic!



Deus Ex

Gritty, dirty and ambient with a mix of jazz, techno and classical moments. The music changed depending on the players actions.



Castlevania

The boss theme 'Shudder' and the background music will haunt your dreams and cripple your mind. Good times had by all!

MADDEN NFL 08 7

Some great improvements and plenty of modes.

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 9

Great co-op and an exhaustive list of Marvel's greatest.

MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE 6

A dinosaur of an FPS – wait for *Brothers in Arms* instead.

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: TARGET IN SIGHT 3

A rubber godzilla of a title. What a pipe blocker!

MX VS. ATV UNTAMED 6

Feels like a PS2 port, looks like a PS2 port. Disappointing.

NBA 08 5

Fails to pick a side (sim or arcade) and so fails at both.

NBA 2K8 8

Not as pretty as *LIVE* but has more depth.

NBA LIVE 08 8

Best of its kind. B-ball devotees will adore it, guaranteed.

NBA STREET HOMECOURT 8

The brashest, most addictive arcade basketball game yet.

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON 8

The last *NFS* street racer before the series went legit.

NEED FOR SPEED PROSTREET 8

Great smoke, but more depth would've been nice.

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 8

A treasure trove of gaming goodness, super tough.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END 6

A very shallow slash 'em up. Ye be warned.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008 8

Still the best soccer in the biz, but the graphics are dire.

SEGA SUPERSTAR TENNIS 5

Enough with Sonic trying to best Mario.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 4

Mostly terrible. Avoid at all costs.

STRANGLEHOLD 7

Max Payne inspired action, plenty of frantic fun.

TIME CRISIS 4 7

Bi-polar, so stick to the arcade mode.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: AW2 8

A tense, realistic shooter, but *Rainbow Six Vegas* is better.

TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND 6

Struggles to escape the shadow of *SKATE*.

TUROC 7

Packs plenty of bite but it's missing a few teeth.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3 8

Gorgeous and gory, but the lack of split-screen blows.

UEFA EURO 2008 8

A possible contender for football game of the year.

VIRTUA TENNIS 3 8

Some of the best fun four people can have on one PS3.

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2008 7

A solid entry. A few new additions but still plays the same.

MAGIC MOMENTS

Great moments in PlayStation history remembered!



THE GAME: We Love Katamari

THE CONSOLE: PlayStation 2

THE YEAR: 2005

THE MOMENT: Unfortunately for us

Australians, we never got to taste Namco's odd, original title *Katamari Damacy*, as it was only released on the shores of Japan and the USA. But thankfully, we did receive its sequel, known as *We Love Katamari*. The game was a bit of a sleeper hit and was an extremely fun and innovative experience that could be enjoyed by anybody.

The game was madness; as it had the player rolling around a large sticky ball, or Katamari, picking up every object in sight. Eventually making the ball bigger. Before long it's possible to pick up even larger objects. The reason behind all this? Your father, the King of All Cosmos, accidentally destroyed the universe, leaving you to create Katamari balls full of junk to replace planets. It had 'Made in Japan' written all over it. This all gets pretty crazy, and choosing one memorable moment from the game is by no means an easy task. Whether you were at the zoo collecting animals or rollin' with a buddy in multiplayer it was always a charming enjoyable experience.

But the one event that stood out to us was the task in which demanded, through use of an elephant, that you roll up a whole load of crap until you reach a size of 500 metres! As if this isn't insane enough, finishing this before the time limit rewarded you with the ability to continue the joy! Our largest size was approximately 3400 metres, and by this point there wasn't much left to roll up! We'd consumed everything on Earth, until we grew large enough to break off massive chunks of land and continents to add to our massive ball of DOOM. Just when we thought we couldn't possibly obtain anything else, the King of All Cosmos emerges from the sea and collides with our doom ball, it was absolutely awesome, and there was an immense sense of accomplishment all round. Truly epic, in a weird and wonderful way.

Taking a look back at the best in the business...

RETROSPECTIVE



SPINNING THE RING

Looking back at *Shadow Hearts*...

Although the *Final Fantasy* series has been well established as the benchmark for console-based RPG excellence for over a decade now, this hasn't deterred other developers from taking a crack at the crown. Released early on for the PS2 at the same time as *Final Fantasy X*, *Shadow Hearts* was an understandably overlooked gem that went on to garner a fervent cult following and eventually saw the release of two contrasting sequels: the arguably superior *Shadow Hearts: Covenant* and the surprisingly lacklustre *Shadow Hearts: From The New World*. Embracing gothic ambience, a hauntingly dark plot and disturbing enemies straight from an occultist's wet dream, it is primarily *Shadow Hearts*' willingness to appropriate convention and stuff it with the unexpected that makes it essential.

REVENGE & ROMANCE

In what is perhaps a cheeky nod to *Final Fantasy VII*'s opening sequence, *SH* introduces trench-coated protagonist Yuri as he runs the length of a speeding passenger train and busts his way in all in the name of snatching wholesome

damsel-in-distress Alice from the clutches of malevolent older gentleman and arch-villain Roger Bacon. Why? Because voices are keeping him up nights and telling him what to do. Ostensibly a love story, there's little sop save for Alice's subtly developing romantic interest in her enigmatic and untouchable saviour. Rather, typical 'romance' gives way to dire urgency and an intriguing supporting cast until you're staring down the barrel of one of the most genuinely upsetting finales in RPG history. Which is why you've got to go back and do it all again to achieve that elusive second ending...

JUDGE MY RING

SH's take on the well-worn turn-based combat system is indicative of its own mission statement – there's an element of risk in everything your characters do, from attacking to using magic to just firing off an item. This is accomplished via the Judgement Ring, a circular device that pops up before each action with a multitude of coloured sections that must each be hit in turn as a needle spins around it. Inside each coloured section is a smaller red portion which, if

hit, adds extra damage or increased effectiveness to say, a healing item. It can also be altered later on to include more sections, bigger sections, and a slower-moving needle. On the flipside, some enemies can even disrupt it by making all the sections disappear or causing the needle to spin erratically. Each character also has 'Sanity Points', which decrease each round as the horrific creatures they face in battle get the better of their mental stability – when they're all gone, that character enters a state similar to *FF*'s 'berserk'. Yuri's ability to 'fuse' with a multitude of demonic nasties (upgradeable via entering the graveyard in his mind! What the hell?) adds up to a very addictive and hands-on experience that tells a tale which resonates long after that last train leaves the station. Incredible...

— Toby McCasker



KOUELKA

Shadow Hearts is actually not the first game in the series. Released on the PSX by SNK in 2000, *Kouelka* weighed in at four discs and focused on the titular heroine's struggle against the terrors of Nemeton Monastery – both her and said monastery recur prominently in *Shadow Hearts*.



■ Ghosts. On a ghost ship? Whodathunkit...



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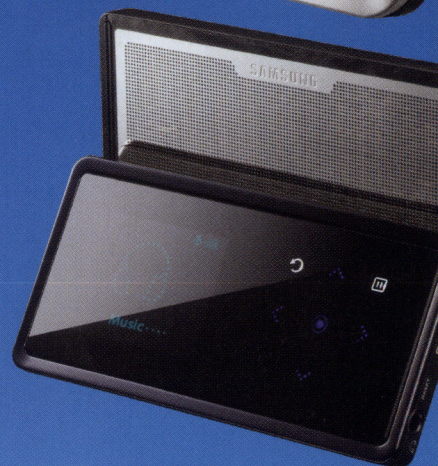


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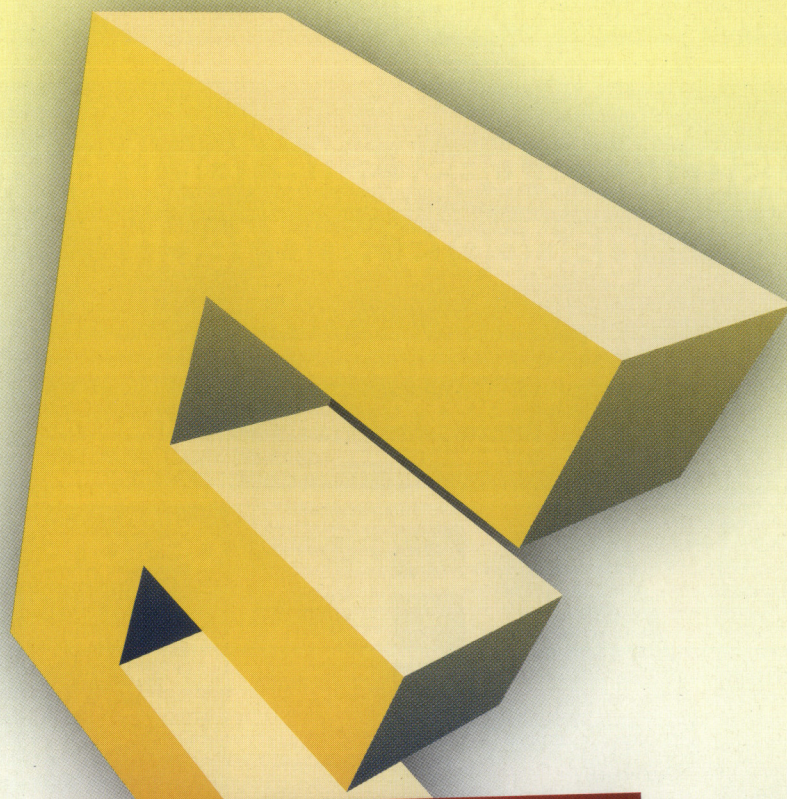
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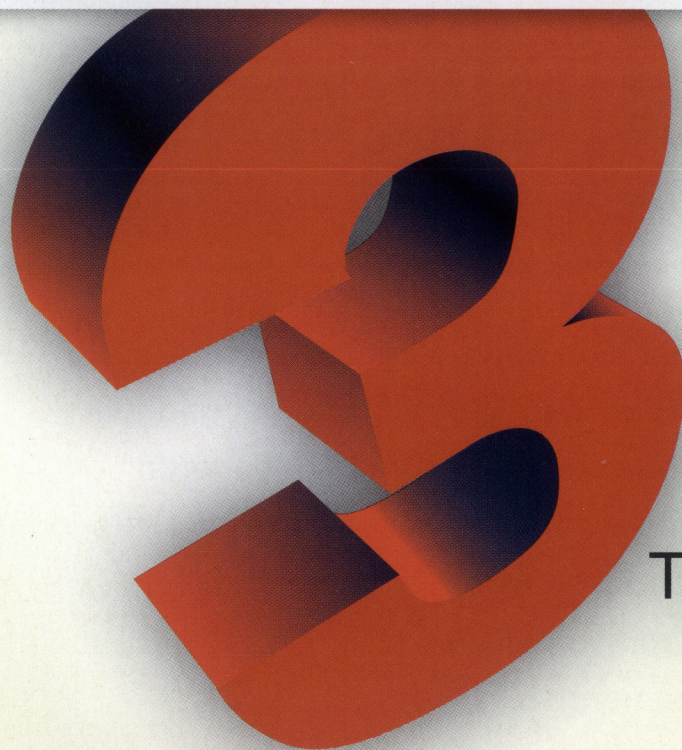


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FIRE AT WILL. FIELD OF FIRE. STEALTH KILL.

BREACH STEALTH

ALPHA TEAM MOBILE

BRAVO TEAM GET MOVING

MOVE OUT

SUPPRESSING FIRE

MOVE AND FIRE

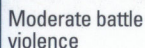
ATTACK TARGET

BRAVO TEAM GET MOVING

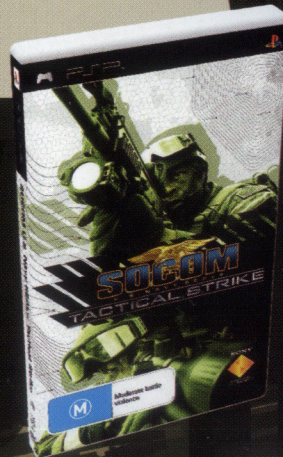
SNIPER

EVALUATE. PLAN. EXECUTE.

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK. YOUR BRAIN IS THE DEADLIEST WEAPON YOU HAVE. FOUR SOLDIERS LIVES ARE IN YOUR HANDS. THEY WILL FOLLOW YOUR COMMANDS ONLY, SO MAKE NO MISTAKES. TAKE CONTROL ONE OF NINE SPECIAL FORCES TEAMS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE AND TEST YOURSELF AGAINST THE BEST IN THE WORLD WITH ONLINE PLAY. OR PIT YOUR WITS AGAINST 3 FRIENDS, CLOSE UP AND PERSONAL, WITH AD-HOC MODE. HOWEVER YOU PLAY YOU MUST ALWAYS EVALUATE THE ENEMY, PLAN YOUR ATTACK, THEN EXECUTE WITH PINPOINT ACCURACY. REMEMBER, THE BEST OF THE BEST ARE IN YOUR HANDS.



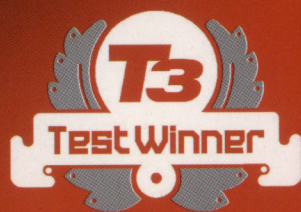
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